

EMILIE M. HERZOG



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AND THE DEVELOPMENT AND
PROGRAMMING OF MATERNAL
AND NEWBORN TISSUES

CLINICAL AND EPIGENETIC STUDIES

PREECLAMPSIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAMMING OF MATERNAL AND NEWBORN TISSUES

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Emilie M. Herzog

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PREECLAMPSIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAMMING OF MATERNAL AND NEWBORN TISSUES

CLINICAL AND EPIGENETIC STUDIES

Preeclampsie en de ontwikkeling en programmering
van maternale en neonatale weefsels
Klinische en epigenetische studies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

009	CHAPTER 1	General introduction
017	PART I	CLINICAL STUDIES
019	CHAPTER 2	The impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on umbilical cord blood cell populations <i>Journal of Reproductive Immunology</i> , 2016 Aug. 116: p. 81-85
033	CHAPTER 3	Impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on features of placental and newborn vascular health <i>Placenta</i> , 2017 Jan. 49: p. 72-79
049	CHAPTER 4	Microcirculation in women with severe preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome: a case-control study <i>British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology</i> , 2014. 121: p. 363–370
063	PART II	EPIGENETIC STUDIES
065	CHAPTER 5	Tissue-specific DNA methylation profiles in newborns <i>Clinical Epigenetics</i> , 2013. 5: p. 8-12
073	CHAPTER 6	The tissue-specific aspect of genome-wide DNA-methylation in newborn and placental tissues: implications for epigenetic epidemiologic studies <i>Submitted</i>

107	CHAPTER 7	Early- and late-onset preeclampsia and the tissue-specific epigenome of the placenta and newborn <i>Placenta</i> , 2017. 58: p. 122-132
137	CHAPTER 8	DNA hypomethylation of placental growth factor and decreased SAM:SAH ratio in placental tissue of preeclampsia-complicated pregnancies <i>Submitted</i>
149	PART III	
151	CHAPTER 9	General discussion
167	CHAPTER 10	Summary / Samenvatting <i>De dans van DNA: een aanvulling op de Nederlandse samenvatting</i>
179	ADDENDUM	
180		References
192		Authors and affiliations
194		List of abbreviations
196		List of publications
198		About the author
199		PhD Portfolio
203		Acknowledgements



CHAPTER 1

General introduction

In line with the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD) paradigm, epidemiological and experimental animal studies have associated adverse intrauterine conditions with increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease throughout the offspring's lifespan ^{1,2}. For instance, offspring exposed to pregnancies complicated by preeclampsia (PE) have enhanced risks of increased blood pressure and body mass index in childhood and early adolescence and nearly a double risk of stroke in adulthood ³⁻⁷. Moreover, the American Heart Association has recently added PE to the list of risk factors for developing cardiovascular disease, as women who experienced PE have a fourfold increased risk of developing hypertension and a more than twofold increased risk of dying from cardiovascular diseases ^{3,8,9}.

PREECLAMPSIA

PE affects 2-8% of all pregnancies and is considered a major obstetric problem due to the high prevalence of maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality ³. This complex disorder is characterised by gestational hypertension of at least 140/90 mmHg accompanied by an urine protein/creatinine ratio of ≥ 30 mg/mmol arising *de novo* at or after 20 weeks of pregnancy, although the new clinical definition also includes gestational hypertension with one or more of the following new-onset conditions: proteinuria, thrombocytopenia, impaired liver function, renal insufficiency, pulmonary oedema or cerebral or visual disturbances ^{3,10}. Two main disease entities have been identified with early-onset PE (EOPE) as the more severe phenotype, diagnosed before 34 weeks of gestation, and late-onset PE (LOPE) diagnosed at or after 34 weeks of gestation ^{3,11}.

Although the pathophysiology of both phenotypes is not yet fully understood, there is extensive evidence that EOPE originates from poor first trimester placentation, characterised by early unplugging of spiral arteries, superficial trophoblast invasion and insufficient remodelling of spiral arteries in the myometrium, causing episodes of placental hypoxia and reperfusion ¹². The poor and restricted placental development in EOPE is associated with small placental volume and often fetal growth restriction (**Figure 1A**). Whereas LOPE is considered a more maternal disorder originating from underlying maternal cardiovascular- and metabolic risk factors, with potential trophoblast dysfunction at the end of gestation due to villous overcrowding in large, term placentas without prior pathology and typically well-grown fetuses ¹³. Both phenotypes are characterised by an excessive production of placental induced reactive oxygen species (ROS) which induce a hyperoxidative state to which the developing

embryo and fetus are exposed. In LOPE this occurs more towards the end of gestation than in EOPE (**Figure 1B**)¹¹. As a result, pro-inflammatory cytokines and (anti)angiogenic factors are released into the maternal circulation inducing maternal endothelial dysfunction, leading to the clinical symptoms of PE¹⁴.

EPIGENETICS

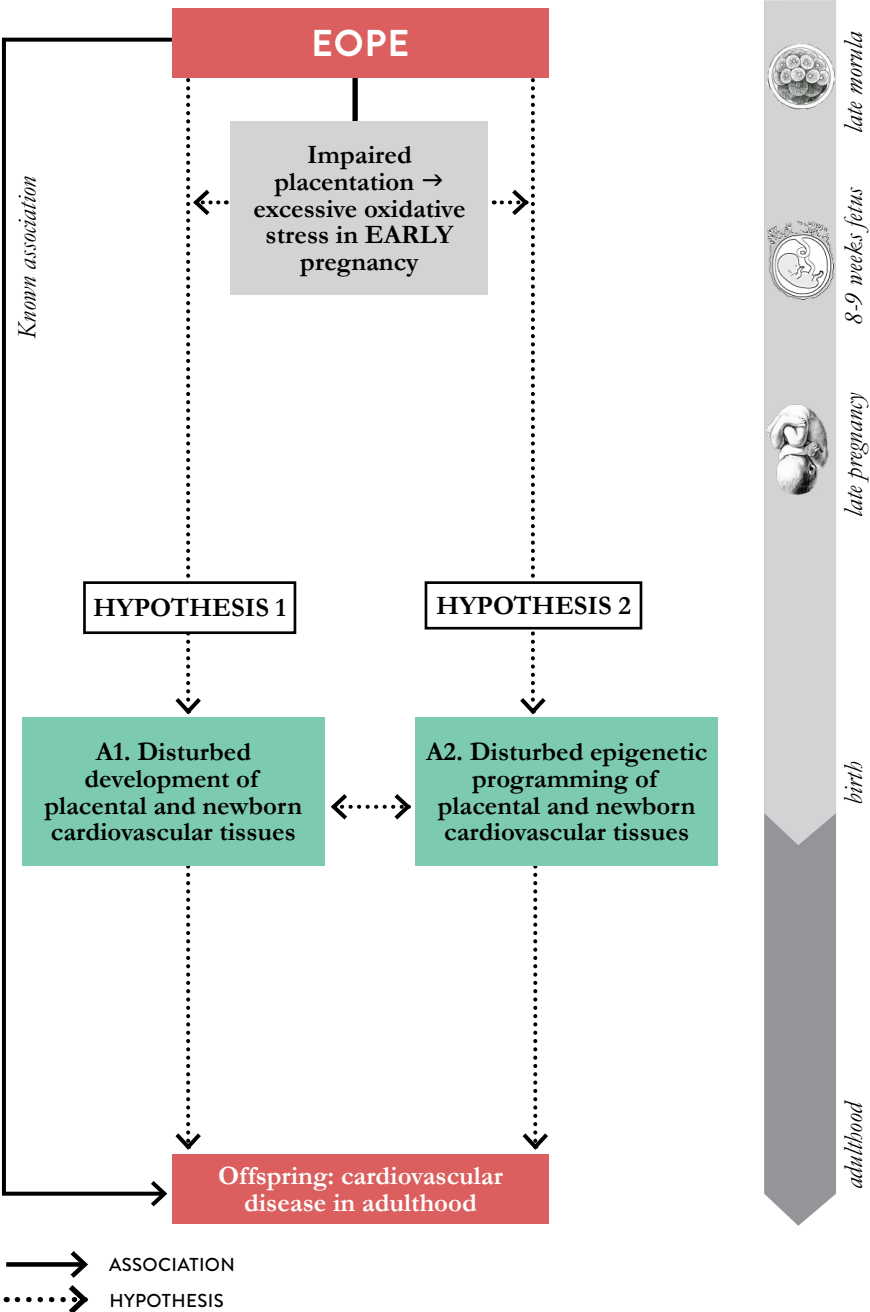
The adverse prenatal PE environment can disturb the development and programming of placental and newborn tissues¹⁵⁻¹⁷. This development and programming is subject to complex interactions between genes and environmental conditions. The process of developmental programming is strongly mediated by various epigenetic mechanisms^{18, 19}, that can be defined as '*chromosome-based mechanisms that change the phenotypic plasticity in a cell or organism*'²⁰. This allows for the generation of diverse cell phenotypes and functions of an organism from a single genome, and for the regulation of gene-expression in response to a range of environmental exposures²¹. Epigenetic processes generally involve the regulation of gene-expression without changing the underlying DNA sequence¹⁸.

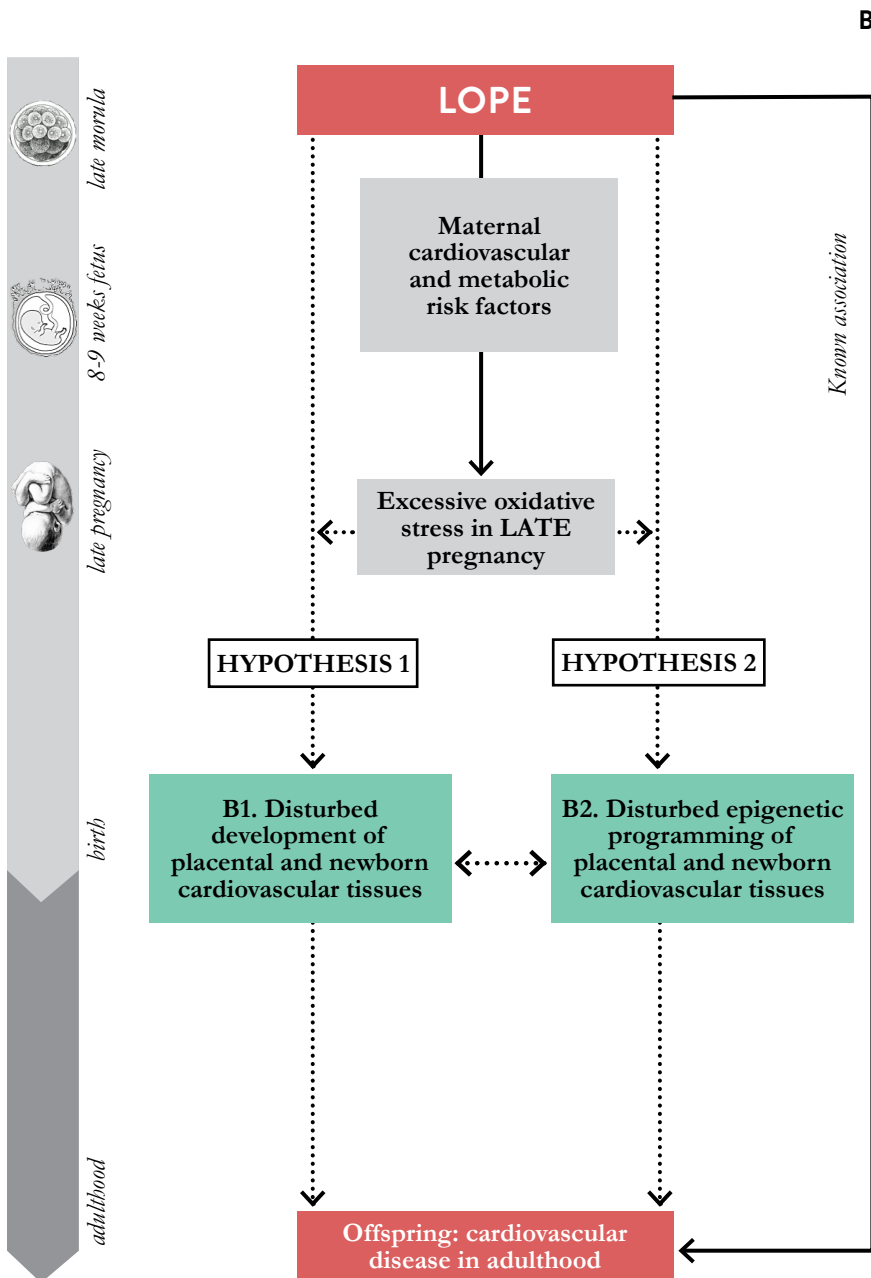
DNA methylation is the best-characterised epigenetic modification, involving the attachment of a methyl group on predominantly cytosine nucleotides that precede a guanosine nucleotide in the DNA sequence (so-called CpG dinucleotides)²². DNA methylation is established in a tissue-specific manner and takes place at various positions on the genome, relative to genes and CpG-density. The function of DNA methylation seems to vary within this context affecting the relationship between DNA methylation and transcription²³⁻²⁶. Disturbed epigenetic programming of specific tissues such as the placenta, is suggested to be involved as cause or consequence, in the development of PE¹⁸.

HYPOTHESIS

From this background we hypothesize that prenatal PE exposure is associated with a disturbed development (1) and epigenetic programming (2) of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues, resulting in a cardiovascular phenotype of the newborn that is more susceptible to develop cardiovascular diseases later in life²² (**Figure 1**).

FIGURE 1. A





PLACENTAL AND NEWBORN TISSUES

Since it is not feasible to study our hypotheses in the cardiovascular tissues of the human embryo and fetus directly, we aimed to examine human umbilical cord vein endothelial cells (HUVEC), umbilical cord blood, and placental tissue in clinical and epigenetic studies. It is known that these tissues are essential for normal embryonic and fetal development and involved in the pathophysiology of PE. They may therefore provide novel insights into the potential development and programming of long-term cardiovascular disease susceptibility, and unravel underlying mechanisms.

The umbilical cord vasculature, originating from the intra- and extra-embryonic mesodermal layers, is the best accessible representative tissue of the newborn vasculature, and its development is highly influenced by local haemodynamic conditions of pregnancy, such as blood flow, oxygen tension and oxidative stress ^{20, 21, 27}. The umbilical cord vessels are responsible for transport of oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood and deoxygenated blood and metabolic waste between mother and child ^{28, 29}. Umbilical cord blood (UCB) originates from the same embryonic mesodermal layers as HUVEC and provides information on the prenatal inflammatory- and haematopoietic systemic conditions and as such represents a widely-studied, easily-accessible newborn tissue ²⁷. The main regulatory organ of the intrauterine environment is the placenta, serving as a metabolic, immunologic and endocrine organ of extra-embryonic origin. By monitoring fetal demands and intrauterine adaptations, the placenta regulates fetal growth and development. Due to its involvement in the pathophysiology of PE, the investigation of placental tissue is crucial in this context ^{30, 31}.

OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

The main objectives of this thesis are to investigate:

1. The development of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (a), and of the maternal microcirculation in association with PE (b) (**Part I**)
2. The tissue-specific DNA methylation in placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (**Part II**)

METHODOLOGY

Data for the studies in this thesis was obtained from a nested case-control study embedded in the Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort (Predict Study), a prospective tertiary hospital-based cohort study conducted at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre

Rotterdam, the Netherlands³². Pregnant women and their newborns were recruited between June 2011 and June 2013. Enrolment was aimed early in the first trimester of pregnancy, but was also possible if patients were admitted to our hospital after the first trimester, meeting the inclusion criteria. Maternal and newborn characteristics were obtained from hospital medical records. Umbilical cord tissue (including HUVEC), umbilical cord blood and placental tissue were collected and subjected to flow-cytometric, histological and (genome-wide) epigenetic analysis.

Cases comprised of women with pregnancies that were complicated by EOPE or LOPE. PE is known to be complicated by fetal growth restriction (FGR) in 12% and iatrogenic preterm birth (PTB) in 20%³³. These conditions can independently influence the intrauterine development and epigenetic programming of placental and newborn tissues³⁴⁻³⁶. In order to examine associations with EOPE and LOPE independent of FGR and PTB, control pregnancies comprised of both uncomplicated and complicated normotensive FGR and PTB pregnancies.

To investigate associations with the maternal microcirculation, women with severe PE with or without HELLP syndrome (haemolysis, elevated liver enzymes and low platelets), and healthy controls were included between November 2009 and September 2012 for the study described in chapter 4. Both study populations were recruited and conducted at the same hospital department.

THESIS OUTLINE

The first objective is addressed in Part I of this thesis by performing three clinical studies. Chapter 2 describes the associations between EOPE, LOPE and umbilical cord blood cell populations. In chapter 3 we address whether EOPE and LOPE are associated with placental and umbilical cord (vascular) (histo-) morphological alterations. The associations between the maternal microcirculatory perfusion and severe PE are studied in chapter 4.

Part II describes both gene-specific and epigenome-wide DNA methylation studies. The first two chapters (chapter 5 and 6) address the tissue-specific characteristics of DNA methylation in newborn tissues, on a genome-wide level and of the imprinted Insulin-like growth factor 2 (*IGF2*)/*H19* genes. This is followed by chapter 7 and 8 that evaluate the associations between EOPE, LOPE and variations in tissue-specific DNA methylation, both genome-wide and in placental-specific angiogenic genes.

Chapter 9 covers the general discussion of the main findings, methodological considerations, clinical implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

The impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on umbilical cord blood cell populations (Journal of Reproductive Immunology, 2016 Aug. 116: p. 81-85)

CHAPTER 3

Impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on features of placental and newborn vascular health (Placenta, 2017 Jan. 49: p. 72-79)

CHAPTER 4

Microcirculation in women with severe preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome: a case-control study (British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 2014. 121: p. 363–370)

An abstract ink blot or paint splatter is centered on a teal background. The blot features a mix of red, black, and white colors, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The text 'PART 01' is overlaid on the blot in a large, white, sans-serif font.

PART 01

CLINICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER 2

The impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on umbilical cord blood cell populations

E.M. Herzog, A.J. Eggink, M. van der Zee, J. Lagendijk, S.P. Willemsen, R. de Jonge, E.A.P. Steegers, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen

Journal of Reproductive Immunology, 2016 Aug. 116: p. 81-85

ABSTRACT

Pregnancies complicated by preeclampsia (PE) are characterised by an enhanced maternal and fetal inflammatory response with increased numbers of leukocytes in maternal peripheral blood. The impact of PE on newborn umbilical cord blood cell (UCBC) populations however, has been scarcely studied. We hypothesise that PE deranges fetal haematopoiesis and subsequently UCBC populations. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate newborn umbilical cord blood cell populations in early- (EOPE) and late-onset PE (LOPE).

A secondary cohort analysis in the Rotterdam Periconceptional cohort was conducted comprising 23 PE cases, including 11 EOPE and 12 LOPE, and 195 controls, including 153 uncomplicated and 23 fetal growth restriction and 19 preterm birth complicated controls. UCBC counts and differentials were quantified by flow cytometry and analysed as main outcome measures.

Multivariable regression analysis revealed associations of EOPE with decreased leucocytes (monocytes, neutrophils, eosinophils, immature granulocytes) and thrombocyte counts and increased NRBC counts (all $p < 0.05$). EOPE remained associated with neutrophils ($\beta -0.92$, 95%CI $-1.27, -0.57$, $p < 0.001$) and NRBC counts ($\beta 1.11$, 95%CI $0.27, 1.95$, $p = 0.010$) after adjustment for gestational age and birth weight. LOPE did not reveal any significant association.

We conclude that derangements of fetal haematopoiesis, in particular of neutrophils and NRBC counts, are associated with EOPE only, with a potential impact for future health of the offspring. This heterogeneity in UCBC should be considered as confounder in epigenetic association studies examining EOPE.

INTRODUCTION

Preeclampsia (PE) is a heterogeneous disease with early-onset (EOPE) and late-onset (LOPE) PE as the main phenotypes. Due to inadequate spiral artery remodelling with suboptimal placental perfusion, excessive amounts of oxidative stress can lead to an enhanced release of syncytiotrophoblast microparticles and cytokines, which particularly contributes to the pathogenesis of the more severe EOPE phenotype¹¹. In contrast, LOPE shows a relatively normal initial placentation and is associated with conditions that enhance excessive oxidative stress and placental inflammation later in pregnancy, such as obesity and pre-existing hypertension^{3, 14}. Circulating syncytiotrophoblast microparticles can induce an increased maternal systemic inflammatory response with increased numbers of neutrophils and total leukocytes in maternal peripheral blood^{37, 38}. The impact of PE on newborn umbilical cord blood cell (UCBC) populations, however, has been scarcely studied.

During pregnancy, haematopoiesis takes place in the yolk sac, liver, bone marrow as well as in the placenta, generating all blood cell types from a small population of pluripotent hematopoietic stem cells as pregnancy advances³⁹⁻⁴². We hypothesise that PE, in particular EOPE, deranges fetal haematopoiesis resulting in heterogeneity of UCBC populations⁴³, and investigated the associations between UCBC counts and differentials in early- and late-onset PE.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design. Between June 2011 and June 2013 we included pregnant women in a prospective hospital based periconception birth cohort: The Rotterdam Predict Study, at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, the Netherlands³². For the current secondary cohort analysis, we selected EOPE and LOPE as cases and uncomplicated pregnancies as controls. To adjust for the often accompanied fetal growth restriction (FGR) and iatrogenic preterm birth (PTB) in PE, we oversampled the uncomplicated control group with FGR and PTB as complicated controls. Pregnancies were included in the cohort during the first trimester (early cohort inclusions) or after the first trimester when they were referred to our hospital (late cohort inclusions).

PE was defined according to the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy as gestational hypertension of at least 140/90 mmHg accompanied by an urine protein/creatinine ratio of ≥ 30 mg/mmol, arising *de novo* after the 20th week of gestation⁴⁴. EOPE was defined when PE was diagnosed

before 34 weeks of gestation, LOPE when diagnosed after 34 weeks of gestation⁴⁵. Uncomplicated control pregnancies were defined as pregnancies without the presence of PE, gestational hypertension, FGR or PTB. FGR inclusion was based on an estimated fetal weight below the 10th percentile for gestational age based on ultrasound measurements performed between 20 and 38 weeks gestational age⁴⁶. Birth weight percentiles were calculated using the reference curves of the Dutch Perinatal Registry to validate birth weight \leq 10th percentile and exclude those newborns with birth weight $>$ 10th percentile⁴⁷. Spontaneous preterm deliveries between 22 and 37 weeks of gestation were defined as PTB⁴⁸. Women with HIV infection, age $<$ 18 years and insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language could not participate and pregnancies complicated with a fetal congenital malformation and twins were excluded for the current study. Maternal comorbidity was defined by any concurrent cardiovascular-, hematologic-, endocrine-, metabolic-, auto-immune- or renal disease. Maternal and fetal characteristics were obtained from hospital medical records. All women gave written informed consent before participation and written parental informed consent was obtained for the child. Ethical approval was given by the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Research Ethics Board (MEC-2004-227).

Collection and handling of blood samples. UCB samples from the umbilical vein were obtained in vacutainer tubes (Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid as anticoagulant), immediately after delivery and clamping of the umbilical cord. Samples were transported at room temperature and subjected to flow cytometric analysis within 48 hours after delivery (Sysmex XE-5000, Sysmex XN-3000 and XS-800i, Etten-Leur, the Netherlands) to quantify erythrocyte, thrombocyte and leucocyte differentials. Between arrival at the Clinical Chemistry Laboratory and time of analysis, samples were stored at four to eight °C. Quality of the blood cell counts was guaranteed by a manual check whereby flow cytometric data of suspect plots or reported system errors were excluded for further analysis.

Statistical analysis. We used cell numbers/L for the analysis of leucocyte differentials and NRBC, which is preferable to the widely used percentages of total leucocyte count, since the largely variable total leucocyte count could result in misleading percentages⁴⁹. The normal distributed maternal and newborn characteristics were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to detect overall differences between the groups, followed by the posthoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with uncomplicated controls and FGR and PTB complicated controls. The Dunnett t-test limits the multiple testing problem by comparing each group to one reference group

only. The Kruskal-Wallis-test was applied to all non-parametric maternal and newborn characteristics, followed by pairwise Mann-Whitney tests for posthoc comparisons.

Log-transformation was applied to the non-parametric UCBC to achieve normal distributions of neutrophils, monocytes, eosinophils, basophils, nucleated red blood cells (NRBC) and immature granulocytes. We converted zero values of neutrophils and NRBC into half of the lowest detectable value of the Sysmex haematology system, prior to log-transformation. Linear regression analysis was performed to investigate the association between UCBC counts and differentials and EOPE/LOPE versus the pooled group of (un)complicated controls. In the crude linear regression analyses, UCBC counts were estimated with group (case-control) as the only predictive variable. In the adjusted multivariable analyses, gestational age and birth weight were additionally entered to the model as covariates, in formula: $[UCBC] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{group} + \beta_2 \text{GA} + \beta_3 \text{BW} + \varepsilon$. Here group is an indicator variable that is 1 for EOPE or LOPE and 0 for the pooled group of (un)complicated controls. [UCBC] represents the concentration of a certain UCBC population. All measurements were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics version 21.0 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL, USA).

RESULTS

From the Predict Study we included all eligible women for this secondary cohort analysis that met the inclusion criteria as described earlier ($n=412$). After exclusion of 194 pregnancies due to missing blood samples ($n=117$) or poor quality of blood cell counts ($n=77$), 218 pregnancies were included for analysis. Patients with missing data were characterised by a shorter gestational age (38.2 versus 39.1 weeks, $p < 0.001$) and lower birth weight (3065 versus 3363 grams, $p < 0.001$) as compared to the final study population, and contained twice as much EOPE- (10.3% versus 5.0%) and LOPE pregnancies (9.3% versus 5.5%, $p = 0.076$), as depicted in **Supplementary table 1**. The final study population comprised 23 cases of PE including 11 EOPE and 12 LOPE, and 195 controls, including 153 uncomplicated controls and 23 FGR and 19 PTB complicated controls (**Supplementary figure 1**).

Maternal and newborn characteristics are shown in **Table 1**. In addition to the case specific parameters blood pressure, proteinuria, gestational age and birth weight, a significant lower mean maternal age in EOPE versus LOPE and uncomplicated controls was shown (27.1 year, versus 34.1 and 32.2 year respectively, overall $p = 0.002$). EOPE pregnancies ended more often in a

TABLE 1. Maternal and newborn characteristics

	EOPE (n=11)	LOPE (n=12)	Uncomplicated controls (n=153)	Complicated controls FGR (n=23)	PTB (n=19)	Overall p-value
Maternal characteristics						
Age (years)	27.1 (5.2)	34.1* (3.8)	32.2* (5.1)	29.3# (5.8)	30.6 (5.2)	0.002
Nulliparous, n (%)	8 (72.7)	7 (58.3)	66 (43.1)	11 (47.8)	6 (31.3)	0.204
Ethnicity, n (%)						
Western	9 (81.8)	7 (58.3)	122 (80.3)	14 (60.9)	15 (83.3)	0.152
Non-Western	1 (18.2)	5 (41.7)	30 (19.7)	9 (39.1)	3 (16.7)	
Preconception BMI ^a (kg/m ²)	26.8 (9.3)	26.4 (2.8)	24.1 (7.1)	23.6 (5.6)	24.1 (7.1)	0.785
Smoking during pregnancy (yes), n (%)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	8 (5.4)	2 (9.1)	1 (6.3)	0.813
Co-morbidity (yes), n (%)	1 (9.1)	3 (25.0)	61 (39.9)	4 (17.4)	3 (15.8)	0.022
Newborn characteristics						
Male gender, n (%)	9 (81.8)	7 (58.3)	77 (50.3)	14 (60.9)	9 (47.4)	0.210
Gestational age at birth ^a (weeks)	31.0 (3.7)	37.4* (1.9)	39.6*# (1.7)	39.0*# (2.6)	35.9*# (4.9)	<0.001
Birth weight ^a (grams)	1155 (353)	3238* (1689)	3515* (563)	2625*# (600)	2650*# (1455)	<0.001
Birth weight <10 th percentile, n (%)	2 (18.2)	2 (16.7)	0*# (0.0)	23*# (100.0)	0 (0.0)	<0.001

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with (un) complicated controls.

Data are presented as number (%) with corresponding Chi²/Fischer's exact testing.

^a Non-parametric data are presented as median (interquartile range) with corresponding Kruskal-Wallis testing and post-hoc Mann-Whitney testing. * p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. # p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies.

ANOVA analysis of variance; BMI body mass index; EOPE early onset preeclampsia; LOPE late onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

caesarean section compared to LOPE and (un)complicated controls (90%, versus 25% and up to 35% respectively, overall p = 0.003). Comorbidity was significantly different between the groups and highest in uncomplicated controls, but no significant differences were observed in the posthoc analysis. Neonatal temperature at birth was similar for each group.

We observed significantly lower cell counts for all UCBC populations and a significantly higher NRBC count in EOPE versus (un)complicated controls. In LOPE only significantly higher neutrophil and erythrocyte counts and lower reticulocyte counts compared to PTB complicated controls were observed (**Supplementary table 2**).

In **Table 2** we show the results of the linear regression analyses of the UCBC counts and differentials of both EOPE and LOPE versus the pooled (un)

complicated controls. The crude estimates revealed that EOPE was associated with the decreased counts of total leucocytes (β -7.6, 95% CI -10.53, -4.76, $p < 0.001$); monocytes (β -0.88, 95% CI -1.26, -0.51, $p < 0.001$); neutrophils (β -1.92, 95% CI -2.25, -1.60, $p < 0.001$); eosinophils (β -0.67, 95% CI -1.16, -0.18, $p = 0.007$); immature granulocytes (β -1.82, 95% CI -2.60, -1.03, $p < 0.001$) and thrombocytes (β -80.19, 95% CI -126.7, -33.7, $p = 0.001$). EOPE was associated with increased NRBC count (β 1.20, 95% CI 0.57, 1.84, $p < 0.001$). After adjustment for gestational age and birth weight, EOPE remained associated with decreased neutrophil count (β -0.92, 95% CI -1.27, -0.57, $p < 0.001$) and increased NRBC count (β 1.11, 95% CI 0.27, 1.95, $p = 0.010$). The linear regression analyses did not reveal any significant association with LOPE versus the (un)complicated control group.

DISCUSSION

In this study we observed that pregnancies complicated by EOPE are associated with decreased leucocyte (monocytes, neutrophils, eosinophils, immature granulocytes) and thrombocyte counts and with increased NRBC counts in umbilical cord blood. After adjustment for gestational age and birth weight, EOPE remained associated with decreased neutrophil and increased NRBC counts.

Our findings demonstrate that the associations of most UCBC counts (total leucocyte, monocyte, eosinophil, immature granulocyte and thrombocyte counts) with EOPE are confounded by gestational age and birth weight, which is in agreement with previous studies^{39, 42}. It revealed that LOPE compared to EOPE has a marginally impact on UCBC populations, which may be explained by its milder phenotype as well as the absence of FGR and PTB in this group. The four to sevenfold decrease of neutrophil count and fivefold increase of NRBC count in association with EOPE however, were independent of gestational age and birth weight. Because the innate immune-system matures during pregnancy, this system of the newborn is prepared to be fully functional at birth by a sudden neutrophil rise during the late third trimester³⁹. The excessive oxidative stress from early pregnancy onwards might have affected UCB neutrophil counts in EOPE by generating enhanced inflammation in the fetal circulation, as demonstrated earlier by higher activated neutrophils and monocytes as well as increased CRP, α -1-antitrypsin and plasma chemokine levels^{50, 51}. As a consequence, fetal endothelial cell dysfunction might occur, by which the maturation and development of fetal haematopoiesis can be

TABLE 2. Linear regression analysis of UCBC count and differentials in EOPE and LOPE versus the (un)complicated control group (n=195)

	EOPE (n=11)		LOPE (n=12)	
	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)
Haemoglobin (mmol/L)	-0.51 (-1.22, 0.21)	0.37 (-0.54, 1.29)	0.36 (-0.28, 1.01)	0.48 (-0.15, 1.12)
Haematocrit (L/L)	0.00 (-0.03, 0.04)	0.05* (0.00, 0.09)	0.02 (-0.01, 0.05)	0.03 (-0.01, 0.06)
Leucocytes				
Total leucocytes ($\times 10^9/L$)	-7.6* (-10.53, -4.76)	0.32 (-3.14, 3.78)	-0.75 (-3.66, 2.16)	-0.07 (-2.68, 2.55)
Lymphocytes ($10^9/L$)	-0.62 (-1.68, 0.44)	0.98 (-0.32, 2.28)	-0.40 (-1.29, 0.50)	-0.19 (-1.05, 0.66)
Monocytes ^a ($10^9/L$)	-0.88* (-1.26, -0.51)	-0.05 (-0.49, 0.39)	-0.10 (-0.41, 0.22)	-0.05 (-0.33, 0.23)
Granulocytes				
Neutrophils ^a ($10^9/L$)	-1.92* (-2.25, -1.60)	-0.92* (-1.27, -0.57)	0.05 (-0.22, 0.32)	0.14 (-0.08, 0.36)
Eosinophils ^a ($10^9/L$)	-0.67* (-1.16, -0.18)	-0.37 (-1.01, 0.26)	-0.08 (-0.49, 0.34)	-0.10 (-0.51, 0.31)
Basophils ^a ($10^9/L$)	-0.51 (-1.12, 0.09)	0.59 (-0.15, 1.32)	-0.05 (-0.56, 0.45)	0.04 (-0.44, 0.52)
Immature gran. ^a ($10^9/L$)	-1.82* (-2.60, -1.03)	-0.15 (-0.78, 1.07)	-0.26 (-0.90, 0.37)	-0.16 (-0.73, 0.41)
Erythroid cells				
NRBC ^a ($10^9/L$)	1.20* (0.57, 1.84)	1.11* (0.27, 1.95)	0.07 (-0.54, 0.68)	0.08 (-0.53, 0.70)
Reticulocytes ($\times 10^9/L$)	18.93 (-9.72, 47.58)	-24.25 (-60.40, 11.91)	1.12 (-25.36, 27.60)	-5.34 (-30.48, 19.80)
Erythrocytes ($\times 10^{12}/L$)	-0.63* (-0.96, -0.30)	0.04 (-0.37, 0.44)	0.12 (-0.17, 0.42)	0.21 (-0.07, 0.49)
Thrombocytes				
Thrombocytes ($\times 10^9/L$)	-80.19* (-126.7, -33.7)	-40.4 (-11.6, 19.8)	-32.05 (-72.25, 8.16)	-28.93 (-69.12, 11.27)

Data are presented as β (95% Confidence Interval) with corresponding multivariable linear regression analysis of EOPE and LOPE versus the (un)complicated controls, crude and with adjustment for gestational age and birth weight. The regression coefficient (β) indicates the increase or decrease (-) change per unit.

^a Log-transformed data. * $p < 0.05$. GA gestational age; BW birth weight; NRBC nucleated red blood cells; UCB umbilical cord blood; EOPE early onset preeclampsia; LOPE late onset preeclampsia; Immature gran. Immature granulocytes.

affected. Fetal haematopoiesis originates from endothelial cells in the ventral aorta of the developing embryo and is thus extremely sensitive to endothelial damage⁵². It has been suggested that the maternal endothelial cell damage is of more importance in EOPE than LOPE and that the excessive oxidative stress develops only towards the end of gestation in LOPE¹¹. This is in line with the observed difference in leucocyte counts between EOPE and LOPE. The association between PE and decreased UCB leucocyte count has been described before and is in agreement with our findings^{39, 53}. Low neutrophil counts might result in a temporarily reduced immune capacity of the newborn,

especially if the child is also born preterm. This might increase the vulnerability for infections.

The observed increase of UCB NRBC in EOPE pregnancies is in line with earlier studies⁵³⁻⁵⁷. However, Akercan- and Catarino et al. did not observe this increase independent of gestational age, which can be explained by the lack of separate analysis for EOPE and LOPE. High numbers of circulating NRBC can reflect an activation of erythropoiesis as a response to the placental ischemia-reperfusion phenomenon resulting from diminished and intermittent perfusion of the intervillous space or a compensation of the erythrocyte-damage, both more profoundly present in EOPE than in LOPE^{11, 53, 55, 58}. The suboptimal placental perfusion results in a relatively hypoxic placental environment, which is beneficial for early invasion of the cytotrophoblast into the maternal decidua. However a prolonged hypoxic placental state may lead to an over-expression of hypoxia-inducible factor 1 α (HIF-1 α), regulating several processes such as erythropoiesis⁵⁹. Placental over-expression of HIF-1 α has been described in PE pregnancies, which may explain our finding of enhanced NRBC counts in umbilical cord blood, being a result of HIF-1 α -induced erythropoietin-release^{59, 60}.

Strengths and limitations. A strength of the study is that we investigated associations between PE and UCBC counts and differentials in EOPE and LOPE separately which revealed a much stronger association between UCBC counts and EOPE, and is relevant concerning the different aetiologies of both. Moreover, associations were investigated independent of gestational age and birth weight.

Pregnancies complicated by EOPE in our study population ended more often in a Caesarean section. This unfortunately resulted in more missing blood samples (n=25, 59.5%) compared to LOPE (n=7, 26.9%, p = 0.009) due to the emergency of the Caesarean sections. Due to the sample size we were not able to adjust for many confounders and therefore inherent to an observational study residual confounding cannot be excluded. The wide confidence intervals demonstrate that the sample size also resulted in a limited power of the study. This implies that certain UCBC values with seemingly clinical relevant UCBC differences between groups might have failed to achieve statistical significance because of lack of power. Additionally, a selection bias due to the relatively high percentage of EOPE and LOPE pregnancies with missing data might be present, but this is an often occurring problem in high-risk patients where medical care is a priority. Another limitation of our study is the tertiary university hospital-setting, in which uncomplicated pregnancies presented

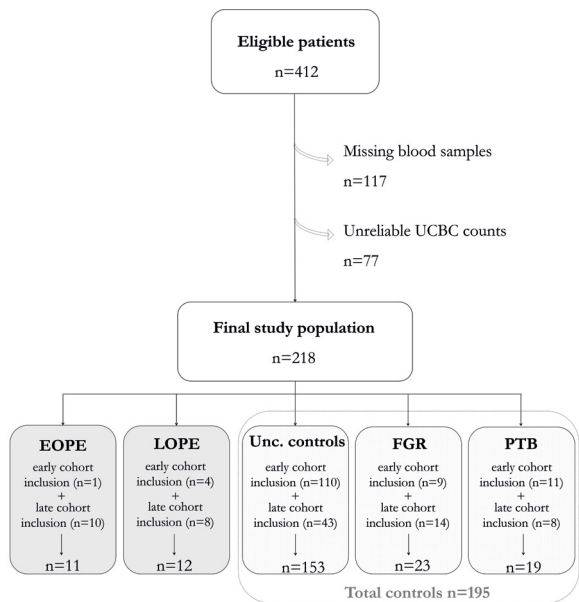
with a relatively high percentage of concurrent comorbidity (40%), for which they were referred. These patients were mostly included in the cohort study in the first trimester of pregnancy. Complicated PE, FGR and PTB pregnancies were more often included as late cohort inclusions after the first trimester. They presented with less additional comorbidity, as visualised in **Supplementary figure 1**. Two neonates only in EOPE and LOPE were complicated by FGR. Therefore, future studies may address differences in UCBC populations in a subgroup of early- and late-onset PE complicated by FGR.

CONCLUSION

Derangements of fetal haematopoiesis, in particular of neutrophils and NRBC counts, are associated with EOPE only. These findings imply potential impact on the future health of offspring and that heterogeneity in UCBC should be considered as confounder in epigenetic association studies examining EOPE. Further investigation is needed to establish the potential impact for future health of offspring.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 1. Flowchart of the study population. *UCB* umbilical cord blood; *EOPE* early onset preeclampsia; *LOPE* late onset preeclampsia; *Unc. controls* uncomplicated controls; *FGR* fetal growth restriction; *PTB* preterm birth.



SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 1. Sensitivity analysis of maternal and newborn characteristics between patients with missing data and the final study population.

	Patients with missing data	Final study population	p-value
Maternal characteristics	(n=194)	(n=218)	
Age (years)	31.5 (4.9)	31.6 (5.3)	0.818
Nulliparous, n (%)	95 (49.0)	98 (45.0)	0.415
Caesarean section, n (%)	78 (40.2)	80 (36.7)	0.465
Ethnicity, n (%)			
Western	23 (20.7)	49 (22.7)	0.685
Non-Western	88 (79.3)	167 (77.3)	
Preconception BMI ^a (kg/m ²)	23.3 (4.8)	24.2 (7.0)	0.113
Smoking during pregnancy (yes), n (%)	6 (5.9)	12 (5.8)	0.968
Co-morbidity (yes), n (%)	43 (35.8)	72 (33.0)	0.602
Case-control status, n (%)			
EOPE	11 (10.3)	11 (5.0)	0.076
LOPE	10 (9.3)	12 (5.5)	
FGR	13 (12.1)	23 (10.6)	
PTB	14 (13.1)	19 (8.7)	
Uncomplicated controls	59 (55.1)	153 (70.2)	
Newborn characteristics			
Male gender, n (%)	96 (49.7)	107 (49.1)	0.894
Gestational age at birth ^a (weeks)	38.2 (4.7)	39.1 (2.4)	<0.001
Birth weight ^a (grams)	3065 (1488)	3363 (814)	<0.001
Birth weight <10 th percentile, n (%)	37 (19.5)	27 (12.4)	0.050

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding independent t-testing to examine differences between the groups.

Data are presented as number (%) with corresponding Chi²/Fischer's exact testing.

^a Non-parametric data are presented as median (interquartile range) with corresponding Mann-Whitney testing. *BMI* body mass index; *EOPE* early onset preeclampsia; *LOPE* late onset preeclampsia; *FGR* fetal growth restriction; *PTB* preterm birth.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 2. UCB cell counts and differentials

	Complicated controls					
	EOPE	LOPE	Uncomplicated controls	FGR	PTB	Overall
	(n=11)	(n=12)	(n=153)	(n=23)	(n=19)	p-value
Haemoglobin (mmol/L)	9.24 (1.41)	10.11 (1.08)	9.78 (0.96)	9.82 (1.32)	9.39 (1.71)	0.254
Missings	1	0	2	0	1	
Haematocrit (L/L)	0.47 (0.07)	0.49 (0.05)	0.47 (0.05)	0.47 (0.07)	0.45 (0.09)	0.387
Missings	1	0	2	0	1	
Leucocytes						
Total leucocytes (x10 ⁹ /L)	6.22 (1.97)	13.11*(3.29)	14.61*(4.62)	12.42*(3.74)	9.53 (5.01)	<0.001
Missings	0	1	8	2	1	
Lymphocytes (10 ⁹ /L)	3.99 (1.10)	4.21 (1.02)	4.70 (1.39)	4.76 (1.44)	3.60 (1.18)	0.034
Missings	4	2	29	4	5	
Monocytes ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	0.55 (0.25)	1.16*(0.42)	1.41*(0.57)	1.05*(0.48)	0.90 (0.44)	<0.001
Missings	4	2	29	4	5	
Granulocytes						
Neutrophils ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	1.04 (0.61)	6.90*(2.21)	7.21*(2.49)	5.71*(2.03)	4.16*#(2.89)	<0.001
Missings	4	2	30	4	6	
Eosinophils ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	0.19 (0.10)	0.36 (0.17)	0.42*(0.24)	0.30 (0.17)	0.37 (0.26)	0.008
Missings	4	2	29	4	6	
Basophils ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	0.07 (0.06)	0.10 (0.08)	0.14 (0.14)	0.07 (0.04)	0.08 (0.07)	0.027
Missings	4	2	30	4	5	
Immature gran. ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	0.06 (0.07)	0.41*(0.51)	0.45*(0.44)	0.19*(0.15)	0.31*(0.56)	<0.001
Missings	5	2	30	4	7	
Erythroid cells						
NRBC ^a (10 ⁹ /L)	5.44 (6.64)	0.99*(0.63)	1.18*(1.24)	1.01*(0.53)	1.68*(2.82)	<0.001
Missings	0	1	12	2	1	
Reticulocytes (x10 ⁹ /L)	201.83(61.83)	184.02(34.39)	178.36(35.04)	175.17(42.86)	227.43#(73.92)	<0.001
Missings	1	1	12	2	1	
Erythrocytes (x10 ¹² /L)	3.79 (0.60)	4.54*(0.40)	4.47*(0.42)	4.37*(0.56)	4.08#(0.89)	<0.001
Missings	1	0	2	0	1	
Thrombocytes						
Thrombocytes (x10 ⁹ /L)	182.11 (83.19)	230.25 (68.23)	266.57*(66.83)	254.61*(72.83)	236.28 (74.48)	0.002
Missings	2	0	2	0	1	

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with (un)complicated controls.

^a Log-transformed data are presented as back-transformed mean (standard deviation).

* p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. # p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies. ANOVA analysis of variance; UCB umbilical cord blood; NRBC nucleated red blood cells; Immature gran. Immature granulocytes; EOPE early onset preeclampsia; LOPE late onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.



CHAPTER 3

The impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on features of placental and newborn vascular health

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Offspring exposed to preeclampsia (PE) show an increased risk of cardiovascular disease in adulthood. We hypothesize that this is mediated by a disturbed vascular development of the placenta, umbilical cord and fetus. Therefore, we investigated associations between early-onset PE (EOPE), late-onset PE (LOPE) and features of placental and newborn vascular health.

Methods. We performed a nested case-control study in The Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort, including 30 PE pregnancies (15 EOPE, 15 LOPE) and 218 control pregnancies (164 uncomplicated controls, 54 complicated controls including 28 fetal growth restriction, 26 preterm birth) and assessed macroscopic and histomorphometric outcomes of the placenta and umbilical cord.

Results. A significant association was observed between PE and a smaller umbilical vein area and wall thickness, independent of gestational age and birth weight. In EOPE we observed significant associations with a lower weight, length and width of the placenta, length of the umbilical cord, and thickness and wall area of the umbilical vein and artery. These associations attenuated after gestational age and birth weight adjustment. In LOPE a significant association with a larger placental width and smaller umbilical vein wall thickness was shown, independent of gestational age and birth weight.

Discussion. Our study suggests that PE is associated with a smaller umbilical cord vein area and wall thickness, independent of gestational age and birth weight, which may serve as a proxy of disturbed cardiovascular development in the newborn. Follow-up studies are needed to ultimately predict and lower the risk of cardiovascular disease in offspring exposed to PE.

INTRODUCTION

In line with the developmental origins of health and disease paradigm, epidemiological studies substantiated by animal studies strongly suggest that adverse prenatal exposures increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases in child- and adulthood ^{1,2}. Preeclampsia (PE) occurs in approximately 2-8% of all pregnancies and accounts for one of the major placental-related pregnancy complications. PE is a complex disease characterised by increased maternal blood pressure and proteinuria during pregnancy and increased risks of fetal growth restriction (FGR) in 12% and preterm birth (PTB) in 20% ³³. Evidence is accumulating that offspring exposed to PE have enhanced risks of increased blood pressure and body mass index in childhood and nearly a double risk of stroke in adulthood ³⁻⁶. Early-onset PE (EOPE) is often more severe than late-onset PE (LOPE) and largely originates from poor first trimester placentation. LOPE seems to be exaggerated by predisposing cardiovascular and metabolic risks for endothelial dysfunction in the second half of pregnancy ³. It was recently suggested that also LOPE may be associated with trophoblast dysfunction due to villous overcrowding in term placentas, leading to diminished intervillous perfusion and increased hypoxia ¹³. Both PE phenotypes show enhanced systemic inflammatory responses resulting in exposure of vessels and tissues to excessive oxidative stress ¹¹.

Impaired placentation is a result of inadequate invasion of the maternal spiral arteries by the trophoblast, and has been suggested to affect placental and fetal growth. A lower placental weight at birth has been shown to predict the risk of hypertension in later life, suggesting an association between placental morphological features and offspring vascular health ⁶¹. The umbilical- cord and fetal vasculature share the same embryonic origin and are derived from intra- and extra-embryonic mesodermal layers ^{28, 29}. Therefore umbilical cord vessels are often used as a model for the investigation of non-accessible fetal vessels to reflect newborn vascular health ⁶²⁻⁶⁶. These vessels are essential for prenatal transport of oxygen, nutrient-rich and deoxygenated blood and metabolic waste ^{28, 29}. The development of the umbilical cord is highly influenced by systemic and local haemodynamic conditions of pregnancy, such as blood flow, oxygen tension and oxidative stress ^{20, 21, 27}.

Here we hypothesize that a poor placental development particularly in severe EOPE induces excessive inflammatory responses and changes in the intrauterine haemodynamics, contributing to the remodelling of the umbilical cord and fetal vasculature and resulting in a vascular phenotype of the newborn at

risk for cardiovascular disease in later life. Therefore, the *objective* of our study was to investigate associations between PE and the phenotypes EOPE and LOPE, and placental and umbilical cord vessel morphology as features of placental and newborn vascular health, in which gestational age and birth weight are taken into account.

METHODS

Study design. Between June 2011 and June 2013 mother-child pairs were recruited before delivery and included in a nested case-control study embedded in the Rotterdam periconception cohort (Predict study), an ongoing prospective hospital-based cohort conducted at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, the Netherlands ³². We selected EOPE and LOPE as cases and uncomplicated pregnancies as controls. In order to reduce confounding by FGR and iatrogenic PTB, we also included FGR and PTB as complicated control groups.

Maternal characteristics. PE was defined according to the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy as gestational hypertension of at least 140/90 mmHg accompanied by an urine protein/creatinine ratio of ≥ 30 mg/mmol arising de novo after the 20th week of gestation ⁴⁴. EOPE and LOPE were defined as being diagnosed before and after 34 weeks of gestation, respectively ⁴⁵. Uncomplicated control pregnancies were defined as pregnancies without PE, gestational hypertension, FGR or PTB. FGR was defined as an estimated fetal weight below the 10th percentile for gestational age based on ultrasound measurements performed between 20 and 38 weeks gestational age ⁴⁶. Birth weight percentiles were calculated using the reference curves of the Dutch Perinatal Registry to validate birth weight < 10th percentile ⁴⁷. PTB was defined as a spontaneous delivery between 22 and 37 weeks of gestation ⁴⁸. Maternal comorbidity was defined by any concurrent presence of cardiovascular-, endocrine-, metabolic-, auto-immune- and/or renal disease. Women with HIV infection, aged < 18 years, not able to read and understand the Dutch language, multiple birth pregnancies or women with pregnancies complicated by fetal congenital malformations were excluded.

Maternal and neonatal characteristics were obtained from hospital medical records. All women gave written informed consent before participation and parental informed consent was obtained for the child. The research has been carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) of the World Medical Association.

Data collection. Macroscopic morphological outcomes including weight, length and width of the placenta and length, diameter, number of vessels and number of coils of the umbilical cord, were performed immediately after delivery. The umbilical coiling index was calculated as the total number of coils divided by the total length of the cord in centimetres. After clamping of the umbilical cord, samples of two centimetres for microscopic morphological examination were obtained next to the clamping site within one hour after delivery and immediately fixed in a 4% formaldehyde solution for paraffin sections. All samples and measurements were obtained by trained researchers according to protocol. Between 00:00h and 07:00h and during weekends, placental measurements were not performed due to logistic constraints.

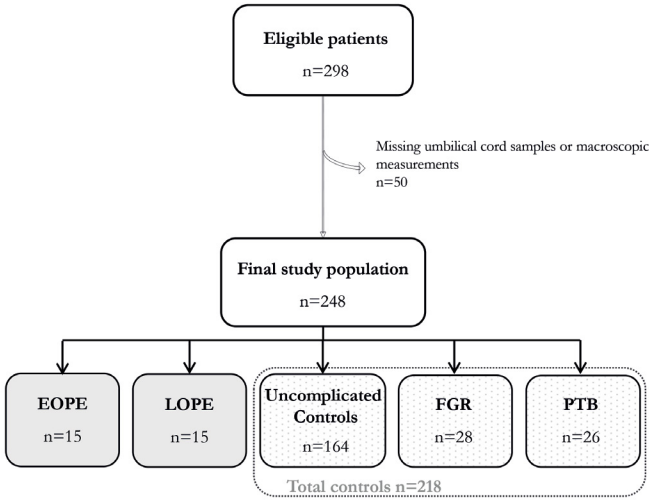
Umbilical cord sample processing. Formalin-fixed umbilical cord samples were cut in transversal slices of four millimetres, perpendicular to the umbilical cord vessels. The slices were dehydrated in graded ethanol series, cleaned in xylene and embedded in paraffin. Paraffin samples were sectioned at 4 micrometre. Sections were deparaffinised and hydrated, before Haematoxylin/eosin (HE) staining and Elastica Von Gieson (EVG) staining was performed. Sections were digitally scanned using a digital slide scanner (NanoZoomer 2.0-HT, C9600-13, Hamamatsu Photonics, Japan) and analysed using the software NDP.view2, U12388-01 (Hamamatsu Photonics, Japan), IMAGE J version 2.0 (National Institutes of Health, US) and KS400 version 3.0 (Carl Zeiss Vision GmbH, Aalen, Germany).

The following parameters of the umbilical cord were measured in digitised HE stained sections; umbilical cord area, Wharton jelly area, vessel area, vessel lumen area and vessel wall thickness. Every individual area was measured manually with Image J⁶⁷. Vessel wall thickness was measured manually in NDP viewer, as the mean of the smallest and largest wall diameter. Artery wall measurements were performed for both the internal and external muscular layer. EVG stained sections were used for the measurement of the percentage of elastin content in the wall of the umbilical artery and umbilical vein and internal elastic lamina (IEL) of the umbilical vein with KS400. The area of elastic fibres in the vessels was digitally marked and divided by the total vessel area to calculate the percentage of elastin content in the vein and in one artery separately.

All measurements were performed blinded by one researcher. Only sections without artefacts were used for analysis. Accuracy of the digital slices and measurements were checked by an experienced pathologist at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre in Rotterdam.

Statistical analysis. For normal distributed maternal and neonatal characteristics

FIGURE 1. Flowchart of the study groups



and outcomes of the umbilical cord and placenta Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied to assess overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons between EOPE, LOPE and uncomplicated and complicated control groups. Kruskal-Wallis was applied to skewed variables, followed by pairwise Mann-Whitney tests for posthoc comparisons.

In the comparisons between PE and the total control group, multivariable linear regression analysis with adjustment for gestational age and birth weight was applied. We additionally applied the multivariable linear regression model to compare EOPE and LOPE with the total control group.

Differences were considered statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. All analyses were performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 21.0, SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL, USA) and logistic regression with SAS version 9.3 (SAS Campus Drive, Cary, NC, USA 27513).

RESULTS

298 women met the inclusion criteria and after exclusion of 50 pregnancies because of missing umbilical cord samples or macroscopic outcomes, 248 pregnancies

remained for further analysis (**Figure 1**). PE cases comprised 15 EOPE and 15 LOPE, and controls included 164 uncomplicated and 54 complicated pregnancies (28 FGR, 26 PTB). Microscopic outcomes were assessed in all EOPE, 14 LOPE, a random selection of 24 uncomplicated- and in 52 complicated control pregnancies.

Maternal and neonatal characteristics are depicted in **Table 1**. Except for the case specific parameters, such as blood pressure, proteinuria, gestational age and birth weight, we observed a higher frequency of nulliparous women in EOPE (80.0%) and LOPE (86.7%) versus uncomplicated controls (40.9%) and PTB (46.2%, overall $p < 0.001$). The frequency of caesarean section was higher in EOPE (80%) compared to LOPE and (un)complicated controls (23.1-37.5%, overall $p = 0.004$). In EOPE, one pregnancy was complicated by FGR (6.7%) versus two in LOPE (13.3%, $p = 1.000$) and all pregnancies were complicated by PTB (100%) versus two in LOPE (13.3%, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2 depicts the results of the multivariable linear regression analyses with gestational age and birth weight adjustments for the associations between the macroscopic morphological placental and umbilical cord outcomes and total PE, EOPE and LOPE versus the total control group. A negative association with placental weight, length and width and umbilical cord length was observed in total PE and EOPE, which attenuated after adjustment for birth weight and gestational age. LOPE was only positively associated with placental width, which remained statistically significant after adjustment for birth weight and gestational age ($p = 0.009$).

Macroscopic morphological outcomes of the placenta and umbilical cord are also depicted in **Supplementary table 1**. In EOPE we observed negative associations with placental weight, length and width and umbilical cord length versus (un)complicated controls (overall $p < 0.001$). In LOPE Dunnett t-testing revealed a significantly higher placental weight compared to FGR, and a higher placental width compared to FGR and PTB complicated controls.

The multivariable linear regression analyses for the microscopic umbilical cord outcomes are depicted in **Table 3**. Since there were no significant differences between the two individual artery measurements, the mean of both measurements was used for further analysis. In PE we revealed a negative association with umbilical cord length, total vessel area, vein area and wall thickness, total artery area, outer artery wall area and artery wall thickness (all $p < 0.05$). After adjustment for gestational age and birth weight, PE remained inversely associated with the vein area ($\beta -1.05$, 95% CI -2.05,

TABLE 1. Maternal and newborn characteristics

	Cases		Uncomplicated	Complicated controls		Overall
	EOPE	LOPE	controls	Normotensive FGR	Normotensive PTB	
Maternal characteristics	(n=15)	(n=15)	(n=164)	(n=28)	(n=26)	p-value
Age (years)	30.4 (5.2)	33.3 (4.7)	32.3 (4.9)	29.7 (5.9)	30.9 (5.1)	0.051
Nulliparous, n (%)	12 (80.0)	13 (86.7)	67*† (40.9)	17 (60.7)	12*† (46.2)	<0.001
Geographical origin, n (%)						
Western	13 (86.7)	8 (53.3)	130 (79.8)	18 (64.3)	22 (84.6)	0.172
Non-Western	2 (13.3)	7 (46.7)	33 (20.2)	10 (35.7)	4 (15.4)	
Preconception BMI‡ (kg/m²)	24.1 (9.1)	24.2 (4.3)	24.1 (7.1)	22.5 (6.2)	23.9 (6.4)	0.620
Smoking in pregnancy (yes), n (%)	2 (15.4)	0 (0.0)	9 (5.7)	2 (7.7)	2 (8.7)	0.549
Co-morbidity (yes), n (%)	1 (6.7)	7 (46.7)	49 (30.1)	7 (25.0)	5 (19.2)	0.115
Neonatal characteristics						
Gender (male), n (%)	5 (33.3)	6 (40.0)	85 (51.8)	15 (53.6)	13 (50.0)	0.622
Gestational age at birth‡ (weeks)	30.7 (3.4)	37.4* (1.9)	39.6*† (1.7)	38.9* (2.6)	35.1*† (6.6)	<0.001
Birth weight‡ (grams)	1185 (435)	3200* (1250)	3560*† (565)	2628*† (593)	2568*† (1674)	<0.001
Birth weight <10 th percentile, n (%)	1 (6.7)	2 (13.3)	0† (0.0)	28*† (100.0)	0 (0.0)	<0.001

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons between EOPE, LOPE and the uncomplicated and complicated control groups.

Data are presented as number (%) with corresponding Chi²/Fischer's exact testing. ‡ Skewed data are presented as median (interquartile range) with corresponding Kruskal-Wallis testing and posthoc Mann-Whitney testing. * p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. † p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies. ANOVA analysis of variance; BP blood pressure; BMI body mass index; EOPE early onset preeclampsia; LOPE late onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

TABLE 2. Multivariable linear regression analysis of the macroscopic morphology of the placenta and umbilical cord in EOPE and LOPE versus the total control group

	PE (n=30)		EOPE (n=15)		LOPE (n=15)	
	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)
Macroscopy of the placenta						
Weight (gr)	-148.0 (-236, -60)*	34.0 (-31, 98)	-300.1(-408.7,-191.5)*	6.7 (-86.6, 100.1)	41.9 (-81.7, 165.5)	55.5 (-288, 1398)
Length (cm)	-2.38 (-3.84, -0.92)*	-0.52 (-1.99, 0.95)	-3.9 (-5.8, -2.0)*	-0.2 (-2.4, 2.1)	-0.7 (-2.7, 1.3)	-0.8 (-2.6, 1.0)
Width (cm)	-1.51 (-2.85, -0.18)*	0.99 (-0.22, 2.21)	-4.8 (-6.4, -3.2)*	-0.8 (-2.6, 1.0)	2.1 (0.3, 3.8)*	2.0 (0.5, 3.6)*
Macroscopy of the umbilical cord						
Length (cm)	-6.92 (-11.75, -2.08)*	-0.33 (-5.50, 4.84)	-15.6 (-22.1, -9.2)*	-5.2 (-13.4, 3.0)	1.8 (-4.7, 8.4)	-2.4 (-4.0, 8.7)
Diameter (mm)	0.69 (-0.71, 2.09)	1.02 (-0.54, 2.58)	0.2 (-1.8, 2.1)	1.1 (-1.4, 3.6)	1.2 (-0.7, 3.1)	1.1 (-0.7, 3.0)
Coiling index (coils/cm)	-0.01 (-0.04, 0.03)	-0.02 (-0.06, 0.02)	0.0 (-0.0, 0.1)	0.0 (-0.0, 0.1)	-0.0 (-0.1, 0.0)	-0.0 (-0.1, 0.0)

Data are presented as β (95% Confidence Interval) with corresponding multivariate linear regression analysis of both EOPE (on the left) and LOPE (on the right) versus the total control group (n=218), crude and with adjustment for gestational age and birth weight. The regression coefficient (β) indicates the increase or decrease (-) change per unit.

* p <0.05. GA gestational age; BW birth weight; PE preeclampsia; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia. Missings are depicted in Supplementary table 1.

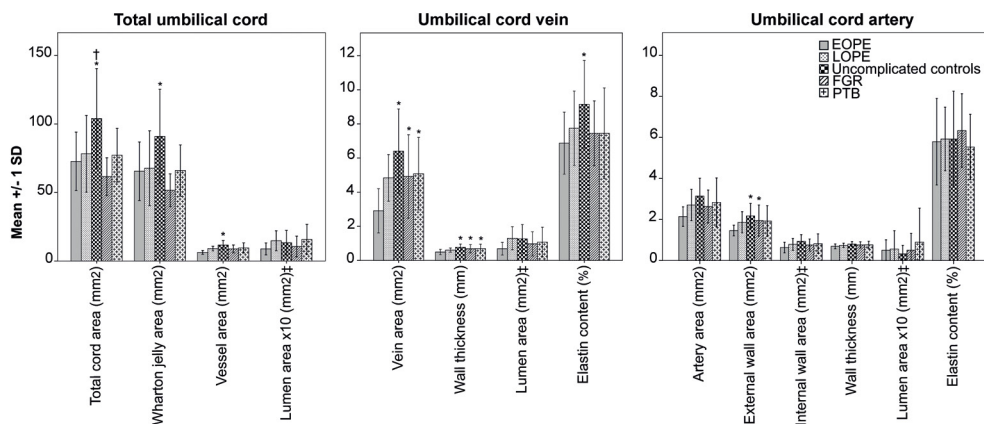
TABLE 3. Multivariable linear regression analysis of the microscopic morphology of the umbilical cord in EOPE and LOPE versus the total control group

	PE (n=29)		EOPE (n=15)		LOPE (n=14)	
	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)	Crude β	Adjusted β (GA+BW)
Total cord area (mm ²)	-8.92 (-21.39, 3.55)	-5.17 (-17.77, 7.43)	-12.1 (-28.7, 4.5)	6.9 (-12.5, 26.3)	-5.8 (-22.8, 11.3)	-11.1 (-27.5, 5.3)
Wharton jelly area (mm ²)	-2.53 (-16.00, 10.93)	-1.41 (-15.09, 12.27)	-3.7 (-22.1, 14.7)	12.4 (-9.4, 34.2)	-1.5 (-19.2, 16.1)	-7.3 (-24.1, 9.5)
Total vessel area (mm ²)	-2.01 (-3.49, -0.52)*	-1.25 (-2.64, 0.14)	-3.3 (-5.3, -1.2)*	-0.3 (-2.7, 2.0)	-0.9 (-2.8, 1.1)	-1.6 (-3.4, 0.2)
Total lumen area (mm ²)	-0.10 (-0.50, 0.31)	-0.32 (-0.46, 0.39)	-0.4 (-1.0, 0.1)	-0.3 (-1.0, 0.4)	0.2 (-0.3, 0.7)	0.1 (-0.4, 0.7)
Umbilical vein						
Total area (mm ²)	-1.67 (-2.71, -0.63)*	-1.05 (-2.05, 0.004)*	-2.6 (-4.0, -1.2)*	-0.8 (-2.4, 0.9)	-0.7 (-2.1, 0.7)	-1.1 (-2.5, 0.2)
Wall thickness (mm)	-0.19 (-0.29, -0.09)*	-0.15 (-0.26, -0.04)*	-0.3 (-0.4, -0.1)*	-0.1 (-0.3, 0.0)	-0.1 (-0.3, 0.0)	-0.1 (-0.3, -0.0)*
Lumen area (mm ²)	-0.11 (-0.44, 0.23)	0.04 (-0.30, 0.37)	-0.4 (-0.8, 0.0)	-0.1 (-0.6, 0.5)	0.2 (-0.3, 0.7)	0.1 (-0.3, 0.6)
Elastin content %	-0.73 (-1.75, 0.29)	-0.26 (-1.31, 0.78)	-1.2 (-2.6, 0.1)	0.4 (-1.2, 2.0)	-0.2 (-1.6, 1.2)	-0.5 (-1.9, 0.9)
Umbilical artery						
Total area (mm ²)	-0.46 (-0.88, -0.05)*	-0.23 (-0.64, 0.18)	-0.7 (-1.3, -0.2)*	-0.0 (-0.7, 0.6)	-0.2 (-0.8, 0.4)	-0.4 (-0.9, 0.2)
External wall layer area (mm ²)	-0.41 (-0.71, -0.11)*	-0.24 (-0.54, 0.06)	-0.6 (-1.0, -0.2)*	-0.2 (-0.6, 0.3)	-0.2 (-0.6, 0.2)	-0.3 (-0.7, 0.1)
Internal wall layer area (mm ²)	-0.14 (-0.29, 0.02)	-0.05 (-0.20, 0.10)	-0.2 (-0.4, -0.0)*	0.1 (-0.2, 0.3)	-0.1 (-0.3, 0.2)	-0.1 (-0.3, 0.10)
Wall thickness (mm)	-0.07 (-0.13, -0.00)*	-0.03 (-0.09, 0.03)	-0.1 (-0.2, -0.0)*	0.0 (-0.1, 0.1)	-0.0 (-0.1, 0.0)	-0.1 (-0.1, 0.0)
Lumen area (mm ²)	0.05 (-0.03, 0.13)	0.03 (-0.57, 0.12)	0.1 (-0.0, 0.2)	0.1 (-0.1, 0.2)	-0.0 (-0.1, 0.1)	0.0 (-0.1, 0.1)
Elastin content %	-0.06 (-0.90, 0.77)	0.13 (-0.74, 1.00)	-0.1 (-1.3, 1.0)	0.4 (-1.0, 1.8)	0.0 (-1.0, 1.1)	-0.0 (-1.1, 1.1)

Data are presented as β (95% Confidence Interval) with corresponding multivariate linear regression analysis of both EOPE (on the left) and LOPE (on the right) versus the total control group ($n=76$), crude and with adjustment for gestational age and birth weight. The regression coefficient (β) indicates the increase or decrease (\pm) change per unit.

* $p < 0.05$. GA gestational age; BW birth weight; PE pre-eclampsia; EOPE early-onset pre-eclampsia; LOPE late-onset pre-eclampsia. Missings are depicted in Supplementary table 2.

FIGURE 2. Microscopic morphological outcomes of the umbilical cord



Microscopic morphological outcomes of the umbilical cord are presented as mean (+/- standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with the (un)complicated control groups. ‡ Skewed data are analysed by Kruskal-Wallis testing.

* $p < 0.05$ versus EOPE pregnancies. † $p < 0.05$ versus LOPE pregnancies. ANOVA analysis of variance; EOPE early onset preeclampsia; LOPE late onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

042

0.04, $p = 0.041$) and vein wall thickness ($\beta -0.15$, 95% CI -0.26, -0.04, $p = 0.006$). EOPE was negatively associated with total umbilical cord vessel area, vein area, wall thickness and artery areas and wall thickness, which attenuated after adjustment for gestational age and birth weight.

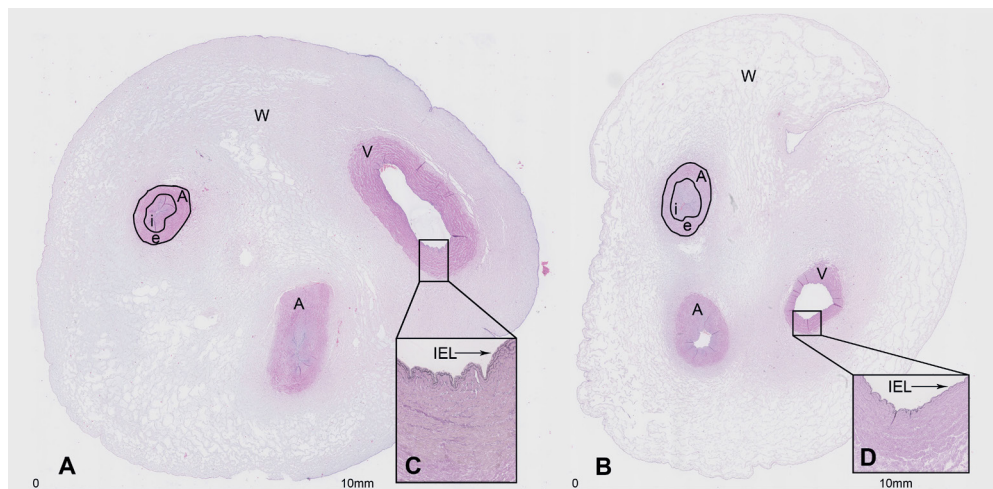
A negative association was observed between LOPE and vein wall thickness, only after adjustment for gestational age and birth weight.

In **Figure 2, 3** and **Supplementary table 2**, the microscopic morphological outcomes of the umbilical cord are depicted per group. In EOPE we observed smaller total umbilical cord areas, vein area, wall thickness, external artery wall area and vein elastin content compared to uncomplicated controls. In EOPE vein total area and vein wall thickness were also significantly smaller compared to FGR and PTB (overall $p = 0.001$ and $p = 0.004$ respectively). In LOPE we only observed a smaller Wharton jelly area versus uncomplicated controls ($p = 0.030$).

DISCUSSION

Main findings. This study shows a negative association between the umbilical

FIGURE 3. Microscopic Transversal sections of the umbilical cord in an uncomplicated control (A) and EOPE (B).



Umbilical cord paraffin section with Haematoxylin Eosin staining. Veins consist of a single layer circular smooth muscle cells and an internal elastic lamina (IEL). The umbilical arteries have a double-layered muscular wall divided in an internal layer of longitudinal smooth muscle cells and an external layer of crossing spiralled smooth muscle cells. Umbilical arteries do not contain an IEL.

A and B. Umbilical cord transversal section of an uncomplicated control (A) and EOPE (B) with a smaller vein area versus (un)complicated pregnancies.

C and D. Umbilical cord transversal paraffin sections with Elastic Van Gieson staining in an uncomplicated control (C) and EOPE (D) with a lower total vein elastin content versus uncomplicated pregnancies (x5).

W Wharton jelly; V vein; A artery; i internal muscular layer; e external muscular layer; IEL internal elastic lamina.

vein area and vein wall thickness in the total group of PE pregnancies, independent of gestational age and birth weight. In EOPE, the negative associations with placental weight, length and width and umbilical cord length, vein and artery wall area and wall thickness are largely explained by a shorter gestational age and lower birth weight. This is in contrast to LOPE showing a positive association with placental width and a negative association with umbilical vein wall thickness independent of gestational age and birth weight.

Strengths and limitations. Strengths of our study are that we established different associations between EOPE and LOPE and microscopic morphological outcomes in umbilical cord vessels and independent of FGR and PTB. The digital qualitative elastin measurement-technique is novel and accurate and seems feasible for future examinations.

Interpretation. The different associations observed in EOPE and LOPE with

placental and umbilical cord morphology can partly be explained by a shorter gestational age and lower birth weight in the more severe EOPE phenotype. In addition, the positive association between LOPE and placental width is even opposite to the association with EOPE, as observed by others ⁶⁸. Kajantie et al. described an association between a smaller placental width and the risk of PE severity, which is in line with our observation in EOPE suggesting that placental width is a marker of placental development ⁶¹. The discrepancy of placental measurements in EOPE and LOPE may be explained by the concept of initial poor and restricted placental development in EOPE versus microvillous overcrowding in term placentas without prior pathology in LOPE ¹³.

The association of an approximately twofold smaller vein area and approximately one-and-a-half-fold smaller vein wall thickness in EOPE compared to the total control group was much stronger than in LOPE, but appeared only independent of gestational age and birth weight in LOPE. This may be due to the exposure to maternal cardiovascular and metabolic risk factors associated with LOPE (47% in LOPE versus 7% in EOPE pregnancies). However, in the total PE group we also demonstrated that the EOPE and LOPE subgroups may in fact be underpowered, by revealing a strong significant association with a smaller vein area and wall thickness in PE, independent of gestational age and birth weight. Moreover, the low rate of FGR cases within the EOPE pregnancies indicates that a relatively small number of pregnancies complicated with severe placental dysfunction leading to FGR were included, which cannot exclude that the observed association is underestimated.

We do believe that the significantly smaller vein wall thickness is related to the adverse influences originating from PE itself and possibly the additional complications of PTB and FGR. Both gestational age and birthweight are highly related to the severity and moment of onset of PE, suggesting that the most evident findings are appearing in the most severe EOPE cases, who suffered from excessive oxidative stress from the beginning of pregnancy. PTB and FGR have indeed been associated with alterations of cardiovascular risk factors in offspring ^{69, 70}. However, as suggested by our data and that of others, the intrauterine PE environment seems to be unique and exacerbates or acts in synergy with any risks inferred by PTB or FGR ⁷. During normal fetal development, the morphology of the vessel walls changes due to a thickening of the elastic lamellae of the media ⁷¹. PE however deranges the haemodynamic characteristics of the materno-fetal circulation with fluctuations in shear stress, which affects the fetal vascular development ^{72, 73}. It

has been shown that umbilical perfusion and elastin content of the umbilical veins are decreased in neonates born after PE ^{62, 65}. Additionally, episodes of placental hypoxia or reperfusion result in excessive oxidative stress and the production of inflammatory cytokines in both maternal and fetal circulation ⁵¹. A disbalance between angiogenic factors and pro-inflammatory chemokines is associated with maternal endothelial cell dysfunction as pregnancy advances with possible consequences for the structure and content of the vessel walls ³. In PE pregnancies a reduced prostacyclin production in endothelial cells of the umbilical cord vessels resulting in decreased placental perfusion and umbilical cord blood flow has been observed ⁷⁴. This substantiates our finding of the smaller umbilical cord vein wall thickness and tendency of decreased elastin content being related to the haemodynamic fluctuations and excessive oxidative stress.

An overexpression of type III and down regulation of type I collagen has been described in umbilical cord veins, arteries and Wharton jelly of neonates exposed to PE, which decreases solubility (water-binding capacity) and may explain the smaller vessel wall thickness and also the decreased elastin content of the umbilical vein walls ^{64, 65}.

Our findings are consistent with Inan et al., who reported a significant reduction in the umbilical vein and artery wall areas of 70 neonates exposed to PE ⁶³. In contrast, two smaller studies reported an increased umbilical artery wall thickness, which may be due to differences in the definition of PE and umbilical cord sampling methods (at the placental side instead of next to the umbilical cord clamping site) and sample sizes ^{62, 66}.

Conclusion. Our study suggests that PE is associated with a smaller umbilical cord vein area and wall thickness, independent of gestational age and birth weight, which may be considered as a proxy for early features of disturbed cardiovascular development in the newborn.

Periconceptional follow-up studies are needed to ultimately predict the risk of cardiovascular disease in offspring exposed to PE which may create opportunities for early prediction, prevention and treatment in the future.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 1. Macroscopic morphological outcomes of the placenta and umbilical cord vasculature

	Cases		Uncomplicated	Complicated controls		Overall
	EOPE (n=15)	LOPE (n=15)	controls (n=164)	Normotensive FGR (n=28)	Normotensive PTB (n=26)	p-value
Macroscopy of the placenta						
Placental weight (gr)	309 (95.5)	650* (184)	656* (153)	452*† (97)	494* (198)	<0.001
Placental length (cm)	16.4 (4.0)	19.7* (3.9)	20.9* (2.9)	18.1 (2.1)	19.5* (3.7)	<0.001
Placental width (cm)	12.3 (1.8)	19.2* (4.2)	17.7* (2.4)	15.2*† (2.2)	15.8*† (2.5)	<0.001
Macroscopy of the umbilical cord						
Length (cm)	34.8 (8.2)	52.2* (12.0)	51.2* (12.3)	49.9* (12.5)	45.1* (12.9)	<0.001
Diameter (mm)	12.8 (4.0)	13.9 (2.9)	12.8 (3.5)	11.3 (3.8)	13.3 (4.4)	0.197
Coiling index (coils/cm)	0.23(0.12)	0.15 (0.06)	0.20 (0.08)	0.18 (0.01)	0.20 (0.10)	0.149

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with the uncomplicated and complicated control groups.

* p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. † p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies. ANOVA analysis of variance; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 2. Microscopic morphological outcomes of the umbilical cord

	Cases		Uncomplicated	Complicated controls		Overall p-value
	EOPE	LOPE	controls	Normotensive FGR	Normotensive PTB	
	(n=15)	(n=14)	(n=24)	(n=26)	(n=26)	
Total cord area (mm ²)	71.7 (20.1)	78.0 (26.9)	99.8* (35.1)	68.3 (21.9)	85.0 (24.1)	0.001
Missings	1	0	1	0	1	
Wharton jelly area (mm ²)	65.5 (21.3)	67.7 (27.4)	91.0*† (34.3)	51.7 (11.9)	66.1 (18.7)	<0.001
Missings	4	1	5	5	12	
Total vessel area (mm ²)	6.7 (1.8)	9.1 (1.7)	11.6* (3.3)	8.8 (2.9)	9.3 (3.7)	<0.001
Missings	3	1	5	5	11	
Total lumen area (mm ²)‡	0.8 (0.5)	1.5 (1.2)	1.3 (1.1)	0.8 (1.1)	1.4 (1.7)	0.192
Missings	3	1	5	5	11	
Umbilical Vein						
Vein total area (mm ²)	2.9 (1.3)	4.8 (1.4)	6.4* (2.5)	4.9* (2.4)	5.4* (2.7)	0.001
Missings	1	0	2	1	0	
Wall thickness (mm)	0.47 (0.17)	0.60 (0.12)	0.76* (0.20)	0.68* (0.24)	0.73* (0.32)	0.004
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
Lumen area (mm ²)‡	0.61 (0.58)	1.30 (0.93)	1.13 (1.01)	0.65 (0.95)	0.90 (1.05)	0.086
Missings	1	0	2	1	0	
Elastin content (%)	5.8 (2.1)	5.9 (1.6)	9.0* (2.5)	7.4 (1.9)	7.5 (2.7)	0.033
Missings	0	0	0	1	1	
Umbilical Artery						
Artery total area (mm ²)	2.2 (0.5)	2.7 (0.8)	3.1 (0.9)	2.8 (1.0)	2.8 (1.2)	0.059
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
External wall layer area (mm ²)	1.4 (0.3)	1.9 (0.5)	2.2* (0.6)	2.0* (0.9)	1.9 (0.8)	0.018
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
Internal wall layer area (mm ²)‡	0.62 (0.25)	0.79 (0.29)	0.85 (0.59)	0.71 (0.40)	0.69 (0.64)	0.068
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
Wall thickness (mm)	0.68 (0.11)	0.74 (0.10)	0.80 (0.13)	0.77 (0.17)	0.76 (0.18)	0.206
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
Lumen area (mm ²)‡	0.03 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	0.03 (0.05)	0.02 (0.07)	0.03 (0.13)	0.437
Missings	0	0	1	1	0	
Elastin content (%)	6.7 (1.8)	7.7 (2.2)	5.9 (2.3)	6.3 (1.8)	5.5 (1.6)	0.686
Missings	1	0	1	2	0	

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with the uncomplicated and complicated control groups.

‡ Skewed data are presented as median (interquartile range) with corresponding Kruskal-Wallis testing.

* p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. † p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies. ANOVA analysis of variance; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.



CHAPTER 4

Microcirculation in women with severe preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome: a case-control study

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ABSTRACT

Objective. To compare microcirculatory perfusion in women with severe preeclampsia against that in healthy pregnant women, and secondly in women with severe preeclampsia with or without HELLP syndrome (haemolysis, elevated liver enzymes, and low platelets).

Design. Case–control study.

Setting. University Hospital Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Population. Twenty-three women with severe preeclampsia and 23 healthy pregnant controls, matched for maternal and gestational age. Out of the 23 women with severe preeclampsia, ten presented with HELLP syndrome.

Methods. Microcirculation was analysed sublingually by a non-invasive sidestream dark-field imaging device (SDF).

Main outcome measures. Perfused vessel density (PVD), microcirculatory flow index (MFI), and heterogeneity index (HI) were calculated for both small vessels ($\emptyset < 20 \mu\text{m}$; capillaries) and non-small vessels ($\emptyset > 20 \mu\text{m}$; venules and arterioles).

Results. There were no significant differences between women with severe preeclampsia and healthy controls. Women with preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome showed a reduced PVD ($p = 0.045$), MFI ($p = 0.008$), and increased HI ($p = 0.002$) for small vessels, as compared with women with preeclampsia but without HELLP syndrome.

Conclusions. Sidestream dark-field is a novel, promising technique in obstetrics that permits the non-invasive evaluation of microcirculation. We did not observe major differences in sublingual microcirculatory perfusion between women with severe preeclampsia and healthy pregnant controls. In women with severe preeclampsia, the presence of HELLP syndrome is characterised by impaired capillary perfusion.

INTRODUCTION

The microcirculation is a vast network of small vessels with a diameter below 100 μm . It consists of arterioles that regulate flow to the capillaries, which subsequently drain in venules⁷⁵. Exchange of oxygen and nutrients occurs at the level of the capillaries, which mainly consist of a thin layer of endothelium. With the availability of new imaging modalities, the importance of microcirculatory perfusion in the pathophysiology, prognosis, and treatment of conditions with profound haemodynamic imbalance, like sepsis, shock, and cardiac disease, is emerging. Parameters of microcirculatory perfusion seem independent of global haemodynamic status and appear to be strong predictors of outcome⁷⁵⁻⁸⁰. Sidestream dark-field (SDF) imaging is a novel technique enabling direct, non-invasive visualisation of microcirculatory perfusion at the bedside in adults, children, and newborns⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷. Severe preeclampsia is characterised by a maternal haemodynamic instability caused by generalised endothelial dysfunction³. Many of its symptoms and complications strongly suggest microcirculatory dysfunction. A recent study indicates that capillary rarefaction precedes the clinical onset of preeclampsia⁸¹. HELLP syndrome (haemolysis, elevated liver enzymes, and low platelets) is considered an expression of disease severity^{82, 83}. Although its exact pathophysiology is not completely understood, the haemolysis, platelet consumption, and liver cell necrosis might reflect a more profound disturbance in microcirculatory function. Our aim was to explore the potential and reliability of SDF in pregnant women, and to analyse microcirculatory perfusion in women with severe preeclampsia as compared with that in healthy pregnant women. Secondly, we investigated the influence of HELLP syndrome on microcirculation in women with severe preeclampsia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study setting. The study was conducted from November 2009 to September 2012 at the department of Obstetrics and Prenatal Medicine of the Erasmus Medical Centre of the University of Rotterdam. Twenty-three women with severe preeclampsia were included. In ten of these women, preeclampsia was complicated by HELLP syndrome. Four women with severe preeclampsia had a history of systemic lupus erythematosus or chronic hypertension. Twenty-three healthy pregnant women, matched for maternal and gestational age, were included as controls. Informed consent was obtained from all women and the study protocol was approved by the local medical ethical committee.

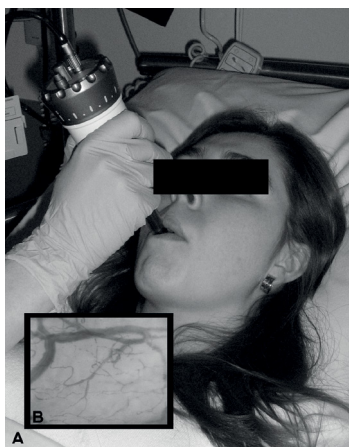


FIGURE 1. Set-up for a sublingual micro-circulatory perfusion measurement with SDF. A disposable sterile plastic cap covers the mouthpiece of the probe (A). A frozen video-clip image of sublingual microcirculation as viewed with SDF (B).

Severe preeclampsia was defined as preeclampsia (hypertension and significant proteinuria) with severe hypertension, and/or with symptoms, and/or with biochemical and/or haematological impairment⁸⁴. HELLP syndrome was defined as the presence of at least two components of either haemolysis (lactate dehydrogenase, LDH ≥ 600 U/l), elevated liver enzymes (aspartate aminotransferase, AST ≥ 70 U/l), or thrombocytopenia (thrombocytes $< 100 \times 10^9/l$)⁸³. All women with severe preeclampsia were categorised into severe preeclampsia either with or without HELLP syndrome according to previous definitions after expert agreement by three of the authors (J.C., E.H., and J.D.). Women with severe preeclampsia were managed according to our local protocol, as described in **Appendix S1**.

In women with severe preeclampsia we aimed to perform microcirculatory analysis at time points when disease activity was estimated to be maximal and when the interference from treatment was estimated to be as minimal as possible. Therefore, measurements were performed either before intravenous nicardipine, magnesium sulphate bolus, or when laboratory abnormalities consistent with HELLP syndrome occurred, irrespective of other concomitant medication. Age, parity, body mass index (BMI), gestational age, and medical history were obtained for all women.

All measurements were performed in a 15° left lateral tilt. Women were asked to refrain from eating or drinking for 30 minutes before measurements. Blood pressure was determined by manual sphygmomanometry. LDH, AST analysis, and thrombocyte count, as well as haematocrit and haemoglobin counts,

were performed as part of the routine clinical procedure in women with severe preeclampsia on the day of the measurements.

Sidestream dark-field imaging. The sublingual microcirculation was visualized using SDF (**Figure 1A**)⁸⁵. This hand-held video microscope (MicroScan; MicroVision Medical, Amsterdam, the Netherlands) emits stroboscopic green light (530 nm) from an outer ring of light-emitting diodes (LEDs), which penetrates the tissue to a depth of approximately 3 mm. The light is absorbed by the haemoglobin of individual red blood cells in superficial vessels. A negative image is transmitted back, after 5× optical magnification, to an isolated synchronised charge-coupled device camera in the core of the probe. This allows high-contrast video images of circulating erythrocytes to be recorded with a 286× magnification from the microcirculation of organs covered with a thin epithelial layer. (**Figure 1B**)⁷⁹. SDF imaging has been validated against and found to be superior to intravital videomicroscopy^{75,85}.

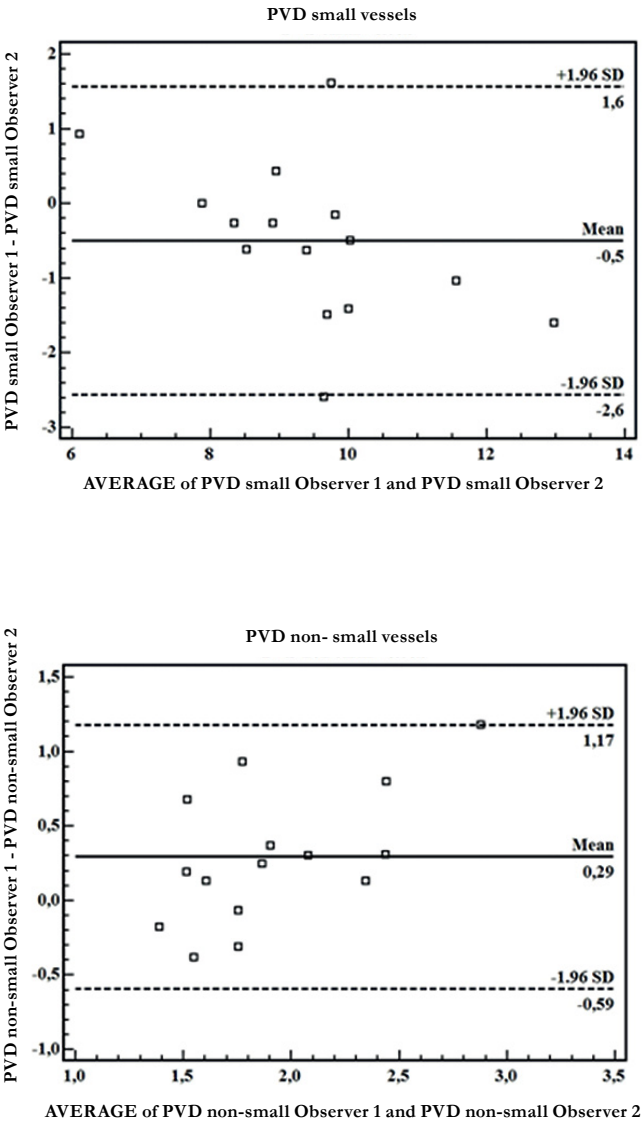
The consensus recommendations on how to best obtain and evaluate SDF measurements were followed^{78,86}. After obtaining good image focus and contrast, with specific attention paid to avoiding pressure artefacts by assuring continuous venous perfusion, one investigator (E.H.) recorded three high-quality video clips per measurement, with a duration of at least 20 seconds, each at a different sublingual site (using a high-definition videocassette recorder: GV-HD700; Sony Instruments, Tokyo, Japan). These were digitalised, blinded, and stored on an external hard drive. After completion of the data set, E.H. performed analysis of the blinded recordings using ava 3.0 (Automated Vascular Analysis, MicroVision Medical, Amsterdam, the Netherlands).

Inter-observer variability was assessed through separate analysis of the 45 recordings of 15 randomly selected cases by a different investigator (E.B.).

As described in the consensus recommendations, the perfused vessel density (PVD), microcirculatory flow index (MFI), and the heterogeneity index (HI) for MFI were calculated, each reflecting distinctive characteristics of microcirculatory perfusion^{78,86}. Each parameter was determined separately for both small vessels ($\varnothing < 20 \mu\text{m}$, capillaries) and non-small vessels ($20 \mu\text{m} \leq \varnothing \leq 100 \mu\text{m}$, mostly venules and arterioles)⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸. A detailed description of these parameters and respective methods of calculation is available in **Appendix S2**.

Statistical analysis. Statistical analysis was performed with spss 20.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Variables were tested for normality and compared with the Students' *t*-test or non-parametric Mann–Whitney *U*-test, as appropriate. The effect of parameters with a known potential to influence haemodynamics

FIGURE 2. Bland–Altman plots showing interobserver agreement for PVD in small and non-small vessels.



(gestational age, use of oral antihypertensive medication), vascular structure (maternal age, BMI, race), or SDF measurements (haematocrit, haemoglobin) was assessed by analysis of covariance (ancova) or by its non-parametric variant (the Quade test), as appropriate⁸⁹⁻⁹³. The adjusted *p-values*, with $P \leq 0.05$ (two-sided) as the limit of significance, were used without correction for multiple comparisons.

Inter-observer reliability was assessed by calculation of the intraclass correlation coefficients from each parameter (PVD, MFI, and HI), separated for small- and non-small vessels in 15 cases. Inter-observer agreement for PVD was shown in Bland–Altman plots.

In the absence of SDF data on microcirculatory perfusion in pregnancy and severe preeclampsia, no power calculation was performed and this study was undertaken as an exploratory pilot.

RESULTS

Adequate recordings and measurements were obtained for all participants. Intraclass correlation coefficients were good for capillary measurements and were moderate for larger vessels (**Table 1**). **Figure 2** shows the inter-observer agreement for PVD in small and non-small vessels. Twelve women with severe preeclampsia received concomitant oral antihypertensive medication. This included women with and without HELLP syndrome. All received methyldopa, nifedipine, or a combination of both. One woman received additional oral labetalol. The baseline characteristics of women with severe preeclampsia and healthy controls were similar (**Table 2**). As expected, blood pressure was significantly higher in women with severe preeclampsia. Preeclampsia was considered to be severe in all women either because of the severity of their hypertension (systolic blood pressure, SBP, ≥ 160 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure, DBP, ≥ 110 mmHg) or because of the presence of HELLP. Baseline characteristics between women with severe preeclampsia, with or without HELLP, were also comparable, except for the components of HELLP syndrome (**Table 2**).

Women with HELLP syndrome had significantly lower values of PVD and MFI and significantly higher values of HI for small vessels, as compared with women with severe preeclampsia without HELLP (**Figure 3A, B**). These differences remained significant after adjusting for haemoglobin count, haematocrit, BMI, medication use, pre-existent disease, maternal age, and gestational age.

TABLE 1. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) and 95% CIs for inter-observer reliability

ICC (95% CI)	PVD	MFI	HI
Small vessels	0.87 (0.61–0.96)	0.94 (0.77–0.98)	0.96 (0.84–0.99)
Non-small vessels	0.66 (0.05–0.89)	0.88 (0.63–0.96)	0.73 (0.15–0.91)

TABLE 2. Population characteristics

Characteristics	Severe preeclampsia (n = 23)	Controls (n = 23)	P
Severe preeclampsia versus control pregnancies			
Nulliparous	54.5%	45.5%	ns
Gestational age (weeks) a	33 (21–37)	33 (20–38)	nt
Age (years)	31 (±5)	31 (±5)	nt
BMI a	28 (20–56)	26 (18–41)	ns
Systolic blood pressure (mmHg) a	170 (130–2015)	110 (99–135)	<0.001
Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg) a	102 (76–115)	68 (50–90)	<0.001
Characteristics	With HELLP (n = 10)	Without HELLP (n = 13)	P
Severe preeclampsia with or without HELLP syndrome			
Nulliparous	50%	54%	ns
Gestational age (weeks) a	30 (21–37)	33 (25–37)	ns
Age (years)	31.1 (±3.9)	31.7 (±6.5)	ns
BMI a	26 (20–32)	30 (20–56)	ns
Systolic blood pressure (mmHg)	157 (±31)	174 (±20)	ns
Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg)	96 (±12)	102 (±7)	ns
Oral antihypertensive medication	40%	69%	ns
LDH (U/l) a	850 (602–2964)	426 (265–575)	<0.001
AST (U/l) a	221 (42–1593)	23 (14–52)	<0.001
Thrombocytes (10 ⁹ /l) a	99 (41–289)	250 (134–375)	<0.001

ns, not significant; nt, not tested (matching criterion). Values are expressed as means ± standard deviations or medians with ranges according to normality.

a Non-parametric test used.

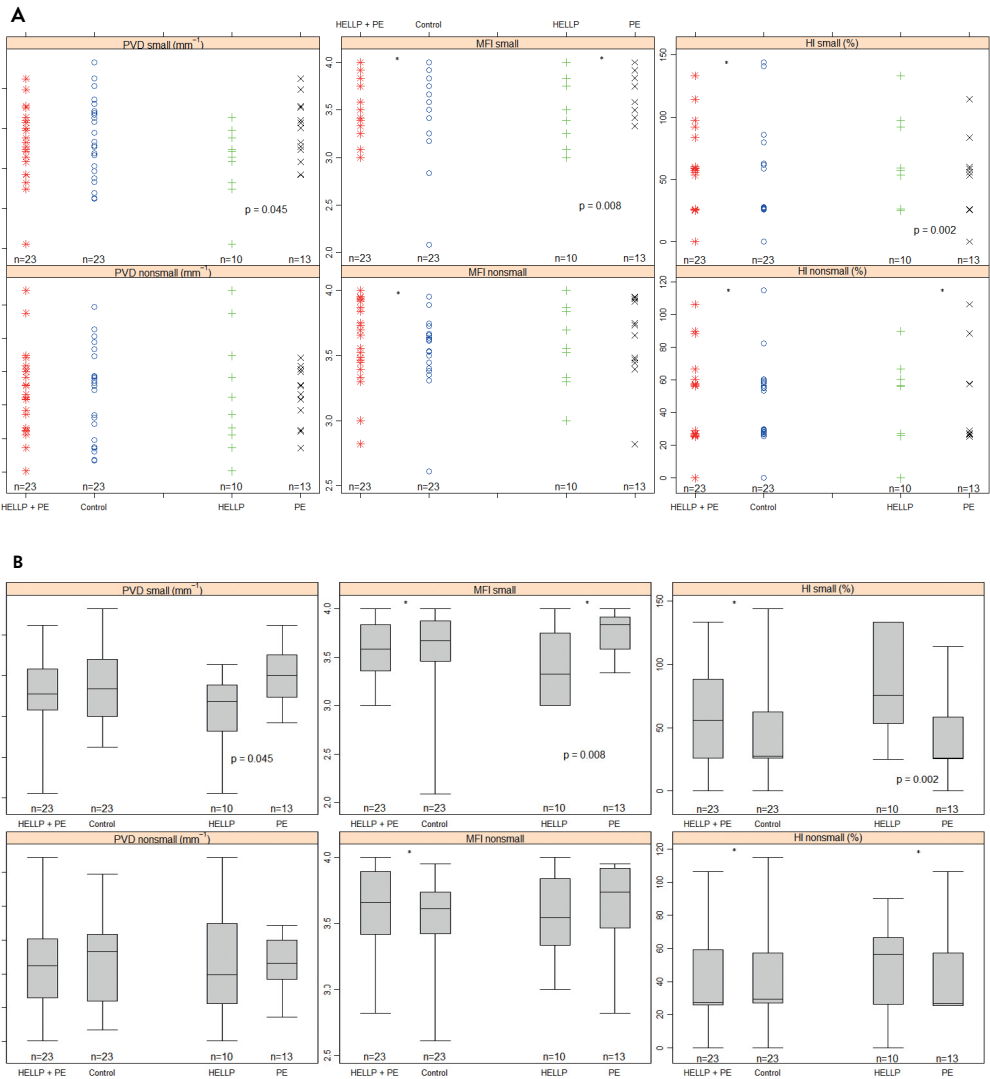
DISCUSSION

Main findings. In this study we explored microcirculatory perfusion in women with severe preeclampsia with SDF, a novel technique in obstetrics. Microcirculatory research has mainly been hampered by technological limitations. SDF allows the direct recording of high-contrast images and assessment of different aspects of microcirculatory perfusion. In our study, satisfactory images were obtained at the bedside and with minimal discomfort in all women. Inter-observer variability showed good reliability for capillary vessels, but is less evident in non-small vessels given the wide confidence intervals for PVD and HI, despite acceptable intraclass correlation coefficients. These findings are in line with previous results in non-pregnant populations^{78, 88, 94, 95}. Fortunately previous research and our results suggest that the capillary compartment is the main area of interest in microcirculatory perfusion. Therefore, SDF seems a preferred method for microcirculatory analysis in obstetrics⁷⁵. Nevertheless, although image recording is relatively straightforward, offline analysis still requires substantial human input and remains time consuming. Developments in the most recent version of the SDF camera now permit automatic image analysis, which will further improve reliability, and holds promise for bedside recording and analysis in the future.

Despite the increased blood pressure we did not observe any difference in microcirculatory parameters in women with severe preeclampsia, as compared with healthy pregnant controls. Apparently, the major macrocirculatory disturbances of severe preeclampsia are not reflected in significant differences in sublingual microcirculatory perfusion. Interestingly, when comparing women with severe preeclampsia with or without HELLP syndrome, we observed significant differences in all aspects of capillary perfusion, with a decrease in PVD and MFI and an increased HI in women with HELLP syndrome.

Interpretation and relation to other studies. Previous microcirculation studies described a decreased venular diameter and increased postcapillary (venular) resistance in women with preeclampsia using intravital microscopy and plethysmography^{96, 97}. Although we did not specifically assess changes in vessel diameters and used different techniques in different organ systems, we did not observe major changes in large vessels, which mostly consist of venules and arterioles to a lesser extent. Hasan, using intravital capillaroscopy, reported a reduced capillary density in 11 women with preeclampsia, as compared with normal healthy pregnant and non-pregnant women⁹⁸. Houben, using a similar set-up, could not confirm these findings, and Vollebregt, using orthogonal polarisation spectral imaging (OPS), did not find any changes in nail fold capillary

FIGURE 3. Scatter plots (A) and box plots (B) depicting differences in PVD, MFI, and HI for small and non-small vessels between women with severe preeclampsia and controls, as well as between women with severe preeclampsia with and without HELLP syndrome.



Boxes denote interquartile ranges, bars in boxes represent median values, and error bars represent ranges. *Non-parametric test used. Adjusted P values are depicted for comparisons with statistical significant difference. PVD Perfused vessel density; MFI microcirculatory flow index; HI and heterogeneity index; HELLP, severe preeclampsia with HELLP syndrome; PE, severe preeclampsia without HELLP syndrome.

red blood cell velocity^{97, 99}. Neither did we observe any changes at a capillary level between women with severe preeclampsia and healthy pregnant women. This discrepancy may be explained by the use of medication in women with preeclampsia, as Hasan performed the measurements before any intervention. Most women in our, Vollebregt's, and Houben's studies had already received some form of antihypertensive therapy, magnesium sulphate, or steroids for fetal lung maturation. These drugs have the potential to influence capillary perfusion¹⁰⁰. In further studies, attempts should be made to perform measurements before any treatment; however, this remains difficult, as the maternal condition often does not permit treatment delay in severe preeclampsia.

The suggestion of impaired capillary perfusion in women with both preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome might explain some aspects of the pathophysiology of HELLP syndrome⁸³. The reduced PVD and MFI might be a reflection of microvascular erythrocyte fragmentation and platelet adherence to the damaged endothelial surface in narrowed capillaries¹⁰¹. The increased heterogeneity could explain the diffuse pattern of liver cell necrosis in HELLP, where fibrin microthrombi and fibrinogen deposits are often observed both in intact hepatic sinusoids and in areas with hepatocellular necrosis upon histology⁸². Heterogeneity of flow is an important characteristic of impaired microcirculation^{75, 78}. With heterogeneous flow, a reduced number of capillaries are perfused. Cells close to the capillaries extract the normal quantity of oxygen, but cells too far away become hypoxic. Although the total oxygen delivery is the same, heterogeneous perfusion probably affects tissue oxygenation more than a reduced but homogenous flow.

Future research. Sublingual microcirculation is easily accessible for SDF. It is representative in sepsis, probably because of the embryological and metabolic similarities with the splanchnic mucosa^{75, 78}. Even so, preeclampsia is a complex syndrome that groups a broad clinical spectrum with variable degrees of organ dysfunction. It is therefore questionable whether the endothelial dysfunction is always manifested equally in all vascular beds. Our results, both in women with and without HELLP, could be explained by the fact that the sublingual microcirculation may not be the most representative site in all pre-eclamptic women. SDF enables microvascular analysis in different areas (e.g. skin, conjunctiva, nail fold, vagina, cervix, etc.). Further research in obstetrics should explore microcirculatory perfusion at various sites during the haemodynamic adaptation of normal pregnancy, and explore eventual representative areas in pathological conditions.

Besides facilitating (patho) physiological research in larger populations, future improved versions with rapid bedside analysis also offer perspectives for clinical implications. As in sepsis and cardiogenic shock, microcirculatory perfusion analysis has the potential to improve outcome prediction, and assist in the selection of candidates for expectant management or monitoring of medical treatment^{80, 102}.

Strengths and limitations. This is the largest population of women with preeclampsia investigated for microcirculatory changes in a prospective, case-controlled design. Our control group of 23 pregnant women is also one of the largest investigated populations of healthy subjects using SDF. The significant capillary differences in women with HELLP syndrome seem supported by a large effect size. Although it remains controversial whether this exploratory set-up allows for adjustment, significant differences remained, irrespective of adjustment for confounding factors. The absence of clinically relevant spread in the 95% confidence intervals of most parameters suggest that the size of our population was probably sufficient to exclude differences in sublingual microcirculation between healthy women and women with preeclampsia. Still, the populations remain small and this study should merely be viewed as an exploratory analysis. Our results certainly need further confirmation in a larger trial, separating women with and without HELLP syndrome, and preferably before any intervention.

Conclusion. Sidestream dark-field (SDF) imaging is a promising technique for the study of microcirculatory perfusion in obstetrics. Our study indicates that there are no major differences in sublingual microcirculatory perfusion between women with severe preeclampsia and healthy pregnant controls; however, HELLP syndrome is associated with an impairment of all aspects of capillary perfusion.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Appendix S1. Description of local clinical management protocol for severe pre-eclampsia.

Antihypertensive therapy with oral medication aimed at blood pressure control within safety limits. Intravenous nicardipine was started in case of hypertensive emergency (systolic blood pressure (SBP) ≥ 160 mmHg or diastolic blood pressure (DBP) ≥ 110 mmHg). Magnesium sulphate was administered for seizure prophylaxis in women with hypertensive emergencies, with signs and symptoms of imminent eclampsia or with HELLP syndrome. Fetal lung maturation as induced with steroids before 34 weeks. No steroid treatment for HELLP syndrome or plasma volume expansion occurred.

Appendix S2. Description of microcirculatory perfusion parameters and respective methods of calculation.

PVD was obtained by multiplying the vessel density by the proportion of perfused vessels. The calculation is based on the principle that density is proportional to the number of vessels crossing 3 horizontal and 3 vertical equidistant lines drawn on the screen. Vessel density was calculated as the number of vessels crossing these lines divided by the length of these lines. Perfusion at the crossings was visually scored: 0 = absent flow, 1 = intermittent flow or 2 = continuous flow. The proportion of perfused vessels was calculated as follows: $100 \times (\text{total number of vessels} - (\text{no flow} + \text{intermittent flow})) / \text{total number of vessels}$. PVD is a good reflection of functional capillary density. For the calculation of MFI an SDF clip was divided in 4 quadrants. The predominant type of flow, characterised as absent, intermittent, sluggish, normal or hyperdynamic, was determined in each quadrant and averaged for all three measurements. The MFI describes the predominant flow pattern of the microcirculatory perfusion. Finally, heterogeneity of microcirculatory perfusion was calculated from the MFI scores of each quadrant of all three sublingual recordings by subtracting the lowest score from the highest score divided by the mean score.

CHAPTER 5

Tissue-specific DNA methylation profiles in newborns (Clinical Epigenetics, 2013. 5: p. 8-12)

CHAPTER 6

The tissue-specific aspect of genome-wide DNA-methylation in newborn and placental tissues: implications for epigenetic epidemiologic studies (submitted)

CHAPTER 7

Early- and late-onset preeclampsia and the tissue-specific epigenome of the placenta and newborn (Placenta, 2017. 58: p. 122-132)

CHAPTER 8

DNA hypomethylation of placental growth factor and decreased SAM:SAH ratio in placental tissue of preeclampsia-complicated pregnancies (submitted)

An abstract ink blot or marbled pattern in shades of pink, magenta, and dark purple, with some black ink splatters, set against a textured yellow background. The pattern is irregular and organic, resembling a biological specimen or a microscopic view.

PART 02

EPIGENETIC STUDIES



CHAPTER 5

Tissue-specific DNA methylation profiles in newborns

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Clinical Epigenetics, 2013. 5: p. 8-12.

ABSTRACT

Background. Epidemiological studies demonstrate that fetal growth restriction and low birth weight affect long-term health. Derangements in tissue-specific epigenetic programming of fetal and placental tissues are a suggested underlying mechanism of which DNA methylation is best understood. DNA methylation has been mostly investigated in DNA from white blood cells. To improve baseline understanding of tissue-specific DNA methylation, we examined variation in DNA methylation profiles of the imprinted fetal growth genes *IGF2* and *H19* in three different tissues from the same newborn obtained at the same time.

Findings. We obtained DNA from umbilical cord blood mononuclear cells (MNC), i.e., CD34+ and CD34- (n = 6), the fetal side of the placenta (n = 5) and umbilical cord Wharton jelly (n = 5). DNA methylation of *IGF2* differentially methylation region (*DMR*) and *H19 DMR* was measured using quantitative mass spectrometry. ANOVA testing showed no statistical difference between total mean methylation of CD34+ and CD34- MNC. Further comparisons were made with the pooled total MNC fraction. Mean *IGF2 DMR* methylation of Wharton jelly (p-value 0.001) was 1.3 times higher than mean methylation of the pooled MNC. Placental mean methylation was 0.8 times lower (p-value <0.001) and Wharton jelly 0.9 times lower (p-value <0.001) than the pooled MNC of *H19 DMR*.

Conclusion. Our study shows that the total MNC fraction is a rather homogeneous cell population for methylation studies of imprinted genes in umbilical cord blood white blood cells. However, these blood cells may not always reflect the methylation levels of *IGF2* and *H19* in other organs.

BACKGROUND

The prenatal period is critical for adverse pregnancy outcome and chronic diseases in adulthood¹⁰³. Epigenetic programming of fetal and placental tissues is a suggested underlying mechanism, of which DNA methylation is best understood^{26, 104}.

DNA methylation profiles are tissue-specific in somatic and germ line tissues^{26, 105, 106}. This is important in the tissue-specific regulation of cellular differentiation and lineage maintenance¹⁰⁷⁻¹⁰⁹. However, human methylation profiles are mostly performed in DNA from an easily accessible, heterogeneous white blood cell population. DNA methylation studies often select imprinted loci as candidate genes, because DNA methylation levels at these loci were assumed to be comparable in different tissues. Recent literature, however, has questioned this assumption^{26, 110, 111}. The imprinted *IGF2-H19* gene complex, involved in placental, embryonic and fetal growth and development, has been described extensively in this context. Both genes are located near each other and are reciprocally imprinted¹¹². It was demonstrated in mice that placental *Igf2* knockout results in fetal growth restriction, whereas *H19* silencing leads to fetal overgrowth^{113, 114}. In human, the phenotype related to the silencing of *IGF2* is Silver Russell Syndrome and *H19* silencing is related to Beckwith Wiedemann Syndrome¹¹⁰.

From this background, we aimed to improve the baseline understanding of tissue-specific variation in DNA methylation profiles of the imprinted genes *IGF2* and *H19*, and therefore examined umbilical cord blood mononuclear cells (MNC), placental tissue and Wharton jelly derived from the umbilical cord. The rationale for selecting these tissues is that they are easily accessible, MNC consist of a rather homogeneous population of white blood cells, and placental and umbilical cord tissues are involved in fetal programming and development. Moreover, morphological abnormalities in these tissues are related to pregnancy complications, in which epigenetic derangements might be involved^{22, 62, 63, 66}. To examine a possible methylation difference between MNC subpopulations, CD34+ and CD34- fractions were also analysed separately.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Maternal, pregnancy and child characteristics. In this study we analysed samples of 6 pregnancies. Median maternal age was 30.5 years (range: 23.8-37.3) and median parity was 0.5 (0-2). All pregnancies were uncomplicated, except 1 gestational hypertension (peak blood pressure: 140/90 mmHg). Deliveries were at term and spontaneously, median birth weight was 3,303 grams (2,795-3,975). 2 Out of 6 newborns were male. Samples were collected after written informed

TABLE 1. Characteristics of primers per gene

	Forward Primer	Reverse Primer	Base pair length (bp)	Position	CpG sites (no.)
<i>IGF2</i> DMR	aggaagagagTGGATAGG AGATTGAGGAGAAA	cagtaatacgaactcactataggagaa ggctAAACCCCAACAAAAA CCACT	338	Chr. 11: 2169458- 2169796	7
<i>H19</i> DMR	aggaagagagGGGTTTGG GAGAGTTTGTGAGGT	cagtaatacga actcactataggagaagg ctATACCT ACTACTCCCTA CCTACCAAC	413	Chr. 11: 2019371- 2019784	20

NCBI build: 37. Tags in lower case

consent was obtained before delivery at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Ethical approval was given by the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Research Ethics Board (MEC-2004-227).

Sample collection. Immediately after delivery of the newborn with the placenta still in situ, umbilical cord blood ($n = 6$) was collected in cord blood collection bags containing 21 mL anticoagulant Citrate Phosphate Dextrose-solution (CPD). Placenta ($n=5$) and umbilical cord ($n=5$) were collected within 10 minutes after delivery of the placenta. Samples of 0.5 cm³ were taken from the fetal side of the placental villi at 4 different sites in a 3 cm radius around the umbilical cord insertion, after carefully removing the membranes and 2 mm of the top placental layer. Wharton jelly from the umbilical cord was isolated in pieces of 0.5 cm² avoiding the umbilical cord vessels. Tissues were frozen immediately in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C until DNA extraction. All samples were collected by two researchers.

Blood cell separation. Umbilical cord blood was processed within 48 hours after collection. Using Ficoll gradient centrifugation, the MNC fraction was obtained and washed. CD34+ MNC were isolated from this pool by magnetic-activated cell separation (MACS) using “Direct CD34 Progenitor Cell Isolation Kit” (MACS Miltenyi Biotec, 130-046-702) according to manufacturer’s protocols. The remaining cells were collected and further analysed as CD34- MNC.

DNA extraction. Placental and Wharton jelly tissues were grinded on liquid nitrogen and lysed overnight at 55°C using cell lysis buffer. Subsequently, genomic DNA was extracted from all tissues using the Gentra Puregene Tissue Kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany), following manufacturer’s instructions.

DNA methylation measurement. The amplicons for *IGF2* and *H19* were described previously ¹¹⁵. The amplicon for *IGF2* is located in the *IGF2* DMR,

upstream of exon 1 of *IGF2*. For *H19*, the amplicon partly overlaps a CpG island, which is part of the *H19* DMR, upstream of exon 1 of *H19*. **Table 1** shows the location, length and primers of the amplicons. Firstly, the amplicons were tested on a standard curve constructed from DNA with low and high methylation (EpigenDx, Worcester, MA, USA) at stages of 10% methylation difference. Only amplicons with a good distribution of the methylation percentages were used for measurements of the samples.

Isolated genomic DNA (500 ng) was treated with sodium bisulphite for 16 hours using the EZ-96 DNA methylation kit (Shallow) (Zymo Research, Irvine, CA, USA). This was followed by PCR amplification, reverse transcription, fragmentation and analysis on a mass spectrometer (Sequenom, Inc, San Diego, USA). This generated mass signal patterns that were translated into quantitative DNA methylation levels per CpG site by Mass ARRAY EpiTYPER Analyzer software (v1.0, build1.0.6.88 Sequenom, Inc, San Diego, USA) ¹¹⁶. Fragments containing one or more CpG sites were called CpG units. Measurements were done in triplicate on DNA from the same bisulphite-treatment batch on different PCR-plates. On every bisulphite plate, standard DNA with low, 25%, 50%, 75% and high methylation was included.

Data cleaning. During quality control (QC), CpG units with a very low mass or very high mass or CpG units with overlapping RNA fragments were excluded from further analysis. Two out of three of the replicate measurements per CpG unit had to be successful, and the standard deviation (SD) of the duplicates or triplicates had to be ≤ 0.10 to be included in the statistical analysis. CpG units with interference of single-nucleotide polymorphisms were also excluded (dbSNP134). After QC, 3 CpG units for *IGF2* DMR and 9 for *H19* DMR remained for further analysis.

Statistical analysis. Possible batch-effects were ruled out by comparing means of the standards per bisulphite-plate and PCR plate with ANOVA-testing. To analyse total methylation per gene and per individual CpG unit between tissues, ANOVA-testing was used, followed by pair-wise comparisons. We adjusted the total methylation per gene for the number of CpG units.

We checked and confirmed the normal distribution by visual inspection of the residuals. Several individual CpG sites showed significant differences in variance of DNA methylation. We excluded one patient and 4 CpGs from further testing for *H19* DMR to deal with this variation. ANOVA was finally performed on 3 CpG units of *IGF2* DMR and 5 CpG units of *H19* DMR.

Firstly, we analysed CD34+ and CD34- MNC separately, followed by a weighted pooled total MNC fraction after these 2 fractions appeared not statistically

TABLE 2. Mean absolute methylation level (SD) of the different tissues per gene and per CpG site

	CD34+ MNC (SD)	CD34- MNC (SD)	Pooled MNC (SD)	placental tissue (SD)	Wharton jelly (SD)
IGF2 DMR (total)	0.55 (0.14)	0.50 (0.13)	0.50 (0.13)	0.54 (0.16)	0.65 (0.13)†*
<i>IGF2 DMR</i> CpG 3	0.59 (0.05)	0.52 (0.02)	0.52 (0.02)	0.59 (0.07)	0.66 (0.07)†
<i>IGF2 DMR</i> CpG 4	0.64 (0.18)	0.59 (0.18)	0.59 (0.18)	0.58 (0.25)	0.77 (0.11)
<i>IGF2 DMR</i> CpG 6.7	0.43 (0.06)	0.39 (0.03)	0.39 (0.03)	0.44 (0.03)	0.52 (0.06)†
H19 DMR (total)	0.30 (0.02)	0.31 (0.02)	0.31 (0.02)	0.25 (0.02)†	0.28 (0.03)†*
<i>H19 DMR</i> CpG 2	0.28 (0.01)	0.29 (0.01)	0.29 (0.01)	0.26 (0.01)	0.27 (0.04)
<i>H19 DMR</i> CpG 9.10	0.31 (0.01)	0.31 (0.02)	0.31 (0.02)	0.26 (0.03)	0.30 (0.04)
<i>H19 DMR</i> CpG 12	0.28 (0.02)	0.29 (0.01)	0.29 (0.01)	0.23 (0.02)†	0.26 (0.02)†
<i>H19 DMR</i> CpG 13	0.30 (0.01)	0.31 (0.01)	0.31 (0.01)	0.24 (0.01)†	0.28 (0.03)
<i>H19 DMR</i> CpG 17	0.34 (0.02)	0.35 (0.01)	0.35 (0.01)	0.25 (0.03)†	0.31 (0.03)*

ANOVA testing between the different tissue groups. Bonferroni correction was applied to all p-values to adjust for multiple comparisons. † p-value <0.05 versus pooled MNC (Pairwise comparisons), * p-value <0.05 versus placenta (Pairwise comparisons)

differently methylated. The original CD34+ and CD34- data was pooled in a 1:100 distribution, comparable to the biological appearance of CD34+ cells in an umbilical cord blood MNC fraction. Bonferroni correction was applied to correct for multiple comparisons. All tests were performed using means of the data in triplicate. Statistical analysis was performed in SPSS version 17.0.2.

RESULTS

The mean methylation of CpG sites of the *IGF2 DMR* and the *H19 DMR* are depicted in **Table 2**. *IGF2 DMR* and *H19 DMR* methylation of CD34+ and CD34- MNC were not statistically different, neither the total mean methylation per amplicon nor the individual CpG units. Therefore, further comparisons were made with the weighted pooled total MNC fraction as a reference group. The mean *IGF2 DMR* methylation of Wharton jelly (p-value 0.001) was statistically significantly higher than the mean methylation of MNC. This was similar in two out of the three individual *IGF2 DMR* CpG units.

The mean *H19 DMR* methylation of both placenta (p-value <0.001) and Wharton jelly (p-value <0.001) was statistically significantly lower than of MNC. This was similar in one out of five individual *H19 DMR* CpG units and only applied

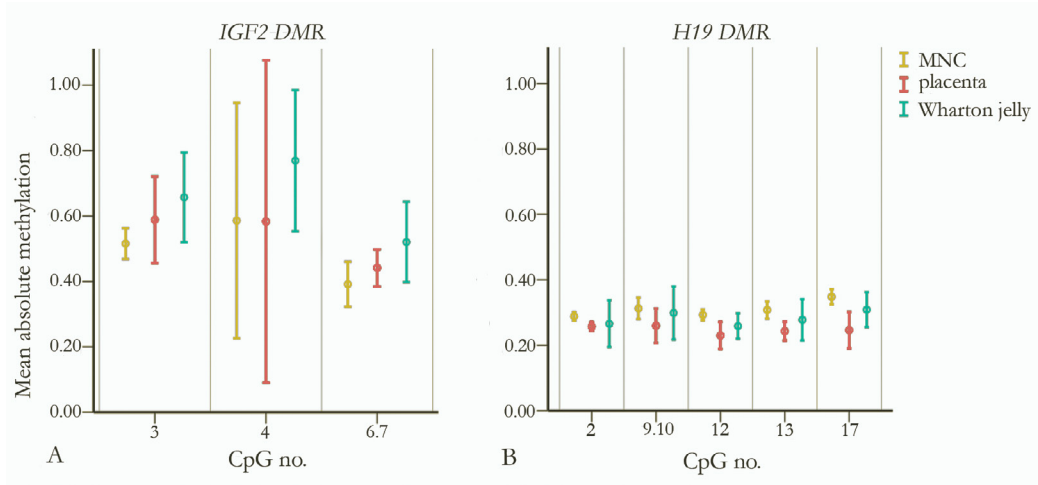
to placenta in two other CpG units. Wharton jelly was statistically significantly higher methylated than placenta in *IGF2* DMR (p-value 0.032) and *H19* DMR (p-value <0.001), as well as one individual *H19* CpG unit (Table 2, Figure 1).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a basic understanding of tissue-specific variation in DNA methylation of two imprinted genes in easily accessible tissues. The total MNC fraction of CD34+ and CD34- appears rather homogeneous for DNA methylation analysis of these genes in umbilical cord blood. The observed between-tissue methylation differences seem to be small and could be explained by either consistently higher and lower methylation, or by differences in sensitivity of tissues to environmental exposures, fetal and maternal factors. This needs further investigation in a larger sample size and therefore only careful conclusions should be drawn from this data.

Thus, umbilical cord blood MNC are useful and easily accessible to study associations between epigenetic programming and pregnancy course and outcome, but not always exactly reflect the methylation levels of other organs.

FIGURE 1. Mean absolute DNA methylation levels per CpG site for *IGF2* DMR and *H19* DMR



Error Plots of mean methylation levels (coloured dots) of all individuals \pm 2 standard deviations (coloured bars) shown for each CpG unit for each of the three tissues separately for (A) *IGF2* DMR and (B) *H19* DMR.





CHAPTER 7

Early- and late-onset preeclampsia and the tissue-specific epigenome of the placenta and newborn

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Preeclampsia (PE) carries increased risks of cardiovascular- and metabolic diseases in mothers and offspring during the life course. While the severe early-onset PE (EOPE) phenotype originates from impaired placentation in early pregnancy, late-onset PE (LOPE) is in particular associated with pre-existing maternal cardiovascular- and metabolic risk factors. We hypothesize that PE is associated with altered epigenetic programming of placental and fetal tissues and that these epigenetic changes might elucidate the increased cardiovascular- and metabolic disease susceptibility in PE offspring.

Methods. A nested case-control study was conducted in The Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort comprising 13 EOPE, 16 LOPE, and three control groups of 36 uncomplicated pregnancies, 27 normotensive fetal growth restricted and 20 normotensive preterm birth (PTB) complicated pregnancies. Placental tissue, newborn umbilical cord blood white blood cells (UC-WBC) and umbilical vein endothelial cells were collected and DNA methylation of cytosine-guanine dinucleotides was measured by the Illumina HumanMethylation450K BeadChip. An epigenome-wide analysis was performed by using multiple linear regression models.

Results. Epigenome-wide tissue-specific analysis between EOPE and PTB controls revealed 5001 mostly hypermethylated differentially methylated positions (DMPs) in UC-WBC and 869 mostly hypomethylated DMPs in placental tissue, situated in or close to genes associated with cardiovascular-metabolic developmental pathways.

Discussion. This study shows differential methylation in UC-WBC and placental tissue in EOPE as compared to PTB, identifying DMPs that are associated with cardiovascular system pathways. Future studies should examine these loci and pathways in more detail to elucidate the associations between prenatal PE exposure and the cardiovascular disease risk in offspring.

INTRODUCTION

Preeclampsia (PE) is a major cause of maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality and is suggested to be associated with the future risk of cardiovascular- and metabolic diseases in mothers and offspring⁷. Two main disease entities have been identified. Early-onset PE (EOPE) is the more severe phenotype originating from impaired placentation during the first trimester of pregnancy; late-onset PE (LOPE) occurs in the third trimester mainly as a consequence of exposure to pre-existing maternal cardiovascular- and metabolic risk factors^{3, 11}. The exact pathophysiology of PE is not understood, but it is known that in EOPE inadequate spiral artery remodelling leads to ischaemia-reperfusion-type placental insults¹⁴. This induces an excessive production of oxidative radicals. As a result, pro-inflammatory cytokines are released into the maternal circulation inducing endothelial dysfunction that leads to the clinical symptoms of PE¹⁴. Excessive placental oxidative stressors are also produced in LOPE but more towards the end of pregnancy¹¹.

PE is considered a complex disease induced by gene- and environmental interactions^{18, 19}. Altered epigenetic programming of specific tissues, induced by excessive oxidative stress, has been suggested to be an underlying mechanism¹⁸. Impaired placental perfusion, excessive production of oxidative radicals, endothelial dysfunction and immune modifications in PE may disturb epigenetic programming in offspring tissues as well, resulting in derangements of the vascular epigenome and function in the offspring^{15-17, 151}. From this background *we hypothesize* that altered epigenetic programming of especially placental tissues is associated with the pathogenesis of PE (as cause or consequence) and with cardiovascular and metabolic risks in the offspring over the life course²².

Although PE has been associated with DNA methylation changes of candidate genes in placental and newborn tissue, only a few epigenome-wide association studies (EWAS) have found new loci of interest and most of these did not examine multiple tissues per patient^{25, 152-156}. In this study we examined tissue-specific genome-wide DNA methylation of umbilical cord white blood cells (UC-WBC), placental tissue and human umbilical cord endothelial cells (HUVEC) in relation to EOPE and LOPE.

Considering that PE is complicated by fetal growth restriction (FGR) in 12 % of cases and associated with iatrogenic preterm birth (PTB) in 20 %, which are conditions that can independently affect epigenetic programming, we examined the epigenome of PE and uncomplicated controls but also that of controls complicated by FGR and PTB³⁴⁻³⁶.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design. Pregnant women and their newborn babies were recruited between June 2011 and June 2013 in a nested case-control study embedded in The Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort (Predict study), at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, the Netherlands ³². Cases comprised of EOPE and LOPE, and unmatched controls comprised of uncomplicated pregnancies and FGR and PTB complicated pregnancies. Patients were recruited for our case-control study by two different pathways. The first pathway contains subjects that were included in the Predict study in the first trimester and developed PE later in pregnancy. The second pathway contains subjects that were admitted to our hospital because of PE after the first trimester, and were specifically recruited in the Predict Study for our case-control study. This also applies to our (un)complicated control groups.

Maternal and fetal characteristics. PE was defined according to the International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy as gestational hypertension of at least 140/90 mmHg accompanied by a urine protein/creatinine ratio of ≥ 30 mg/mmol arising de novo after the 20th week of gestation ⁴⁴. EOPE and LOPE were defined as being diagnosed before and after 34 weeks of gestation, respectively ⁴⁵. Uncomplicated pregnancies were defined as pregnancies without the following pregnancy-specific complications: PE, gestational hypertension, FGR or PTB. FGR was defined as an estimated fetal weight below the 10th percentile for gestational age based on ultrasound measurements performed between 20 and 38 weeks gestational age ⁴⁶. Birth weight percentiles were calculated using the reference curves of the Dutch Perinatal Registry to validate birth weight < 10th percentile ⁴⁷. Spontaneous preterm deliveries between 22 and 37 weeks of gestation were defined as PTB ⁴⁸. Women with HIV infection, aged < 18 years, not able to read and understand the Dutch language, multiple birth pregnancies or women with pregnancies complicated by fetal congenital malformations were excluded.

Maternal and newborn characteristics were obtained from hospital medical records. All women gave written informed consent before participation and parental informed consent was obtained for the child. The research has been carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) of the World Medical Association.

Data collection. UC-WBC samples from the umbilical vein were collected with the placenta still in situ. Thereafter, placental tissue was obtained and HUVEC were isolated and stored until DNA extraction. A detailed description of the

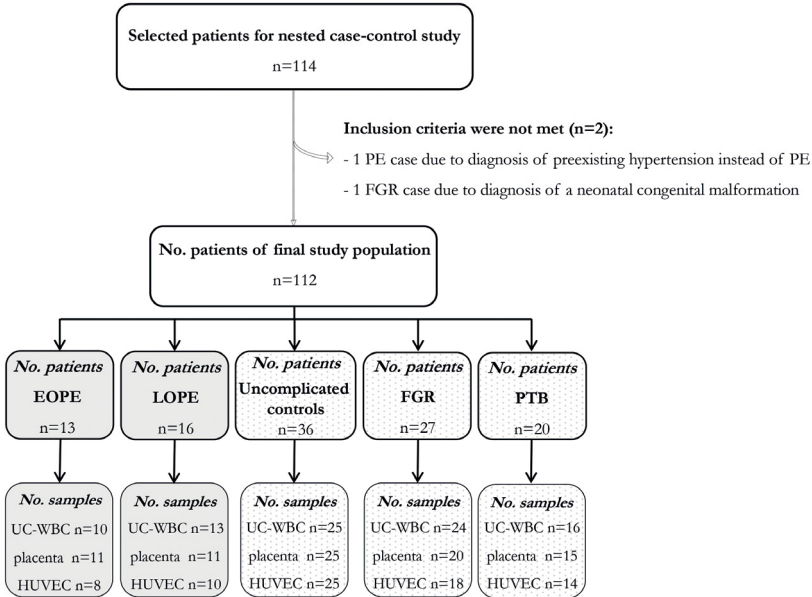
data collection, UC-WBC processing, HUVEC isolation and DNA extraction is provided in **Appendix 1**.

DNA methylation measurement. Isolated genomic DNA (500 ng) was treated with sodium bisulphite using the EZ-96 DNA methylation kit (Shallow) (Zymo Research, Irvine, CA, USA). Hybridization was performed following manufacturer's instructions. DNA methylation of CpGs was measured by the Illumina HumanMethylation450K BeadChip using the manufacturer's protocol (Illumina, Inc., San Diego, CA, USA) ¹³⁸⁻¹⁴⁰. Data quality control and pre-processing is described in **Appendix 2**.

Differentially methylated position (DMP) identification. To improve statistical power, prior to further statistical analysis a selection of probes containing at least ≥ 0.05 SD variability in methylation β -values across all samples was applied for each tissue separately ¹⁵⁷. This resulted in a remaining total of 43,488 UC-WBC probes, 134,700 placental probes and 42,352 HUVEC probes. Methylation β -values were converted to M-values using: $M\text{-value} = \log_2 (\beta\text{-value}/(1-\beta\text{-value}))$ ¹⁴³. A multiple linear regression model was used predicting methylation M-values by disease state for EOPE and LOPE versus (un)complicated controls, adjusted for bisulphite-plate batch and gestational age as covariates for each tissue separately (R package 'CpGassoc'). Sensitivity analyses were performed for the following covariates: batch-effect of the bisulphite-plate, gestational age, birth weight, fetal gender, comorbidity, mode of delivery and moment of inclusion for the study in or >1 st trimester. Only gestational age and bisulphite-plate were thereafter included in our statistical model as potential confounders.

UC-WBC analyses were performed with additional adjustment for total number of UC-WBC leucocytes ($\times 10^9/L$), available from our flow-cytometric data ($n=61$, 70 %) or otherwise imputed ($n=27$, 30 %) ¹⁵⁸. Missing leucocyte numbers were imputed by 'Multiple Imputations with Chained Equations' using other available UC-WBC variables and all contributing maternal and fetal characteristics with maternal age² as the best predictive variable (package mice) ¹⁵⁹. Additionally, Houseman-data was applied during imputation, further predicting proportions of lymphocytes, monocytes and granulocytes based on a community cohort of 94 non-diseased, non-smoking, predominantly female individuals between 24 to 45 years old, which improved the Akaike Information Criterion by 11 ¹²⁴. Imputed leucocyte concentrations are given in **Supplementary table 1**. Due to sample size constraints we could not adjust for further differentiated white blood cell counts.

FIGURE 1. Overview of the study population and sample distribution.



EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth; UC-WBC umbilical cord white blood cells; HUVEC human umbilical vein endothelial cells; no. number of.

We used the following model:

$$M_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 G + \beta_2 GA + \beta_3 \text{PLATE}_2 + \beta_4 \text{PLATE}_3 + (+_5 \text{UC-WBC-leucocytes}) + \epsilon_i$$

where M_i is the (base 2) logit of the methylation of individual i . G is the group indicator variable (that is one if the sample corresponds to EOPE or LOPE and zero otherwise), GA is gestational age and PLATE_2 and PLATE_3 are indicator variables for the sample plates. β_5 is only applied for the UC-WBC analysis. ϵ_i is the residual error assumed to derive from a normal distribution.

A False Discovery Rate (FDR) adjusted p -value below 0.05 was considered significant. CpG sites were classified as DMP if statistically significant and presenting with a minimal effect-size ΔM of 0.8. We considered various M -value cut-off values for further data analysis and applied the widely used robust cut-off of 12.5 % $\Delta\beta$ (~ 0.8 on M -value scale) (Supplementary table 2, Supplementary figure 2)^{145, 153}. For the comparison with the smallest number of

samples (n=8 HUVEC samples in EOPE), we were able to measure methylation differences of at least 10% $\Delta\beta$ or higher, with a power of 0.7 (sd of 0.05 and FDR<0.05). An arbitrary selection of 100 epigenome-wide significant hits was subjected to a critical assessment of M-value plots to exclude potential outlier-driven hits or residual single nucleotide polymorphism-interference.

A detailed description of the DMP CpG-density- and gene-centric enrichment analysis, Gene Ontology (GO) term enrichment analysis and Ingenuity Pathway Analysis (IPA) is provided in **Appendix 3**.

RESULTS

All eligible pregnancies that met the inclusion criteria and provided sufficient tissues were included for the case-control analysis. After exclusion of 2 misclassified pregnancies the final study population consisted of 112 pregnancies. The 29 PE pregnancies comprised of 13 EOPE and 16 LOPE pregnancies, and controls included 36 uncomplicated and 27 FGR- and 20 PTB complicated control pregnancies (**Figure 1**). This number of patients is a result of the initially aimed number of 25 samples per tissue per case-control group. Because we were unable to collect this exact amount of samples and because we obtained often more samples from one patient, the number of corresponding patients differs for each case-control group.

Maternal and newborn characteristics are shown in **Table 1**. In addition to significantly different PE-specific parameters, such as blood pressure, proteinuria, gestational age and birth weight, nulliparity was more frequent in EOPE (84.6 %) and LOPE (81.3 %) than in uncomplicated controls (30.6 %, overall $p = 0.001$). Caesarean section was more frequent in EOPE (84.6 %) than in both LOPE (31.3 %) and (un)complicated controls (20.0-33.3 %, overall $p = 0.002$). In the EOPE group, one pregnancy was complicated by FGR (7.7 %) and all by PTB; in the LOPE group, three pregnancies (18.8 %) were complicated by FGR ($p = 0.606$, in comparison to the EOPE group) and three (18.8 %) by PTB ($p < 0.001$, in comparison to the EOPE group).

DMP identification. Genome-wide DNA methylation data revealed an overall bimodal distribution for UC-WBC and HUVEC (**Figure 2**). In these tissues, only a small amount of cytosine-guanine dinucleotides (CpGs) demonstrated methylation levels around 50 %. In placental tissue however, more CpGs presented 50 % methylation levels. Methylation levels in placental tissue and HUVEC were comparable in all groups, but in EOPE the methylation levels in UC-WBC clearly deviated from those in all other groups.

TABLE 1. Maternal and newborn characteristics

Maternal characteristics	EOPE (n=13)	LOPE (n=16)	Uncomplicated controls (n=36)	Complicated controls		Overall p-value
				Normoten- sive FGR (n=27)	Normotensive PTB (n=20)	
Age (years)	30.0 (4.7)	33.3 (4.5)	31.8 (5.1)	29.7 (6.0)	31.0 (5.1)	0.187
Nulliparous, n (%)	11 (84.6)	13 (81.3)	11*# (30.6)	17 (63.0)	10 (50.0)	0.001
Caesarean section, n (%)	11 (84.6)	5* (31.3)	10* (27.8)	9* (33.3)	4* (20.0)	0.002
Ethnicity, n (%)						
Western geographic origin	12 (92.3)	9 (56.3)	30 (83.4)	17 (63.0)	18 (90.0)	0.074
Non-Western geographic origin	1 (7.7)	7 (43.8)	6 (16.7)	10 (37.0)	2 (10.0)	
Preconception BMI ^a (kg/m ²)	24.7 (10.1)	24.1 (4.4)	23.7 (4.8)	23.0 (6.5)	23.8 (6.1)	0.668
Smoking during pregnancy (yes), n (%)	2 (18.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (8.0)	2 (10.5)	0.132
Co-morbidity (yes), n (%)	1 (7.7)	7 (43.8)	8 (22.2)	7 (25.9)	4 (20.0)	0.260
Newborn characteristics						
Male gender, n (%)	3 (23.1)	7 (43.8)	21 (58.3)	15 (55.6)	10 (50.0)	0.253
Gestational age at birth ^b (weeks)	30.7 (3.4)	37.4* (1.9)	39.9*# (1.9)	38.9* (2.6)	35.4*# (7.9)	<0.001
Birth weight ^c (grams)	1,185 (481)	3,183* (1244)	3,713*# (551)	2,630*# (595)	2,660*# (1805)	<0.001
Birth weight <10 th percen- tile, n (%)	1 (7.7)	3 (18.8)	0# (0.0)	27*# (100.0)	0 (0.0)	<0.001

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation) with corresponding ANOVA testing to examine overall differences between the groups, followed by the post hoc Dunnett t-test for pairwise comparisons of EOPE and LOPE with (un)complicated controls.

Data are presented as number (%) with corresponding Chi²/Fischer's exact testing.

* Non-parametric data are presented as median (interquartile range) with corresponding Kruskal-Wallis testing and posthoc Mann-Whitney testing.

* p <0.05 versus EOPE pregnancies. # p <0.05 versus LOPE pregnancies.

ANOVA analysis of variance; BMI body mass index; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

A heatmap based on the clustering of methylation according to CpG and sample depicts prominent clustering of the three different tissues (**Figure 3A**). We therefore also examined clustering per tissue, which demonstrated EOPE clustering in UC-WBC but no clustering in the placental- and HUVEC samples (**Figure 3B-D**). This was validated by a principal component analysis (PCA) (**Supplementary figure 1**).

Differences between EOPE, LOPE and (un)complicated controls were examined in an epigenome-wide analysis. In the comparison of EOPE and PTB we found 12,040 (28 %) differentially methylated CpGs in UC-WBC and 5,668 (0.5 %) differentially methylated CpGs in placenta. One differentially methylated CpG each

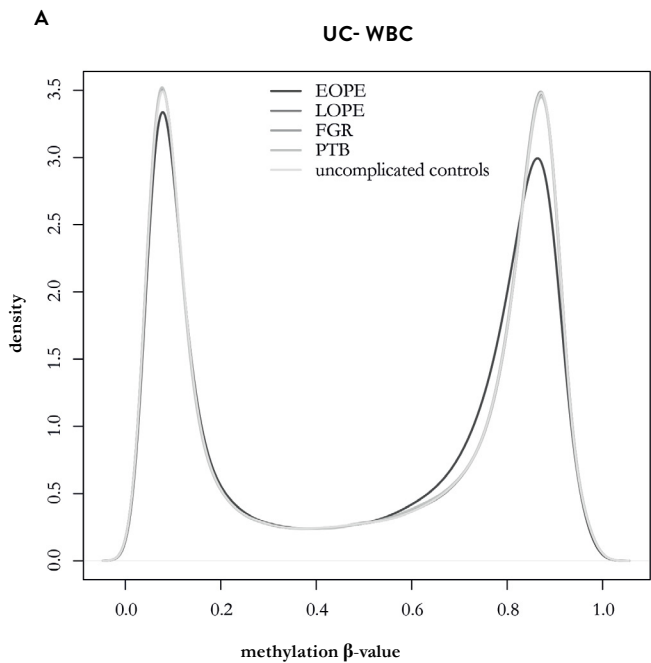
was found in the comparison of EOPE and uncomplicated controls in placental tissue and in HUVEC, and in the comparison of EOPE and FGR in placental tissue (all FDR-adjusted $p < 0.05$). No epigenome-wide significant CpGs were found in the comparisons of LOPE and (un)complicated controls. Differentially methylated CpGs with an effect size > 0.8 in M-value (logit2 of the β -value), representing an approximate change in β -value of 12.5 %, were defined as differentially methylated positions (DMPs), which left 5,001 DMPs in UC-WBC and 869 DMPs in placenta in EOPE compared to PTB (**Supplementary table 2**). 25 DMPs are overlapping between UC-WBC and placenta, which corresponds to 152 shared genes between UC-WBC and placenta. In UC-WBC, 71 % of DMPs were hypermethylated; in contrast, hypomethylation was seen in 67 % of the placental DMPs. Of the shared set of DMPs, 13 (52%) share the same methylation direction in both tissues and 54 (36%) genes are overlapping in methylation direction (**Figure 4**). All (overlapping) UC-WBC and placental DMP identifiers are listed in **Supplementary table 3**.

CpG-density- and gene-centric enrichment of DMPs. To evaluate whether DMPs were enriched in certain genomic annotations, CpG island- and gene-centric annotations of UC-WBC- and placental DMPs were examined (**Figure 5** and **Supplementary table 4**). DMP enrichment analysis relative to CpG islands revealed exactly opposite patterns for UC-WBC and placental DMPs with the strongest enrichment in non-CpG island regions and strongest depletion in CpG islands in UC-WBC ($OR^{UC-WBC} 1.61$, 95 % CI 1.52-1.71 and $OR^{UC-WBC} 0.23$, 95 % CI 0.20-0.26, respectively) versus strongest enrichment in CpG island regions and strongest depletion in non-CpG islands in placenta ($OR^{Placenta} 1.33$, 95 % CI 1.15-1.54 and $OR^{Placenta} 0.72$, 95 % CI 0.62-0.83, respectively) (**Figure 5** and **Supplementary table 4**).

The location of DMPs relative to genes revealed the strongest enrichment in gene bodies with additional high enrichment in downstream regions of the placenta. A strong depletion of DMPs in intergenic regions was observed in both UC-WBC and placental tissue ($OR^{UC-WBC} 0.53$, 95 % CI 0.49-0.58, $OR^{Placenta} 0.63$, 95 % CI 0.53-0.75).

Gene-ontology (GO) term enrichment of DMP genes. To gain more insight in functionality, the DMPs were mapped to the nearest gene. This yielded 3,444 unique UC-WBC genes and 697 unique placental genes. The 3,444 UC-WBC DMP genes mapped to 2,744 genes in The Database for Annotation, Visualization and Integrated Discovery (DAVID) after discarding the remaining DMP annotations as transcripts. These genes were enriched for involvement in cell signalling processes and regulation of cell death, gene expression,

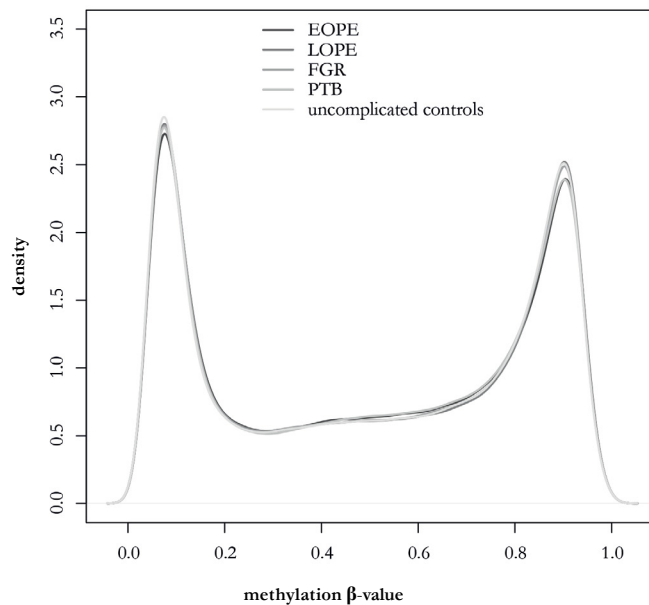
FIGURE 2. Density plot of β -values per tissue and per group.



Density plots show the β -value-densities for UC-WBC (A), placenta (B) and HUVEC (C). Genome-wide DNA methylation data revealed an overall bimodal distribution of methylation levels. In addition, the placenta demonstrated a larger amount of CpGs with methylation levels around 50%, in contrast to the other tissues. In UC-WBC, EOPE deviates from LOPE and (un)complicated control pregnancies.

EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth; UC-WBC umbilical cord white blood cells; HUVEC human umbilical vein endothelial cells; CpGs cytosine-guanine dinucleotides.

B **PLACENTA**



C **HUVEC**

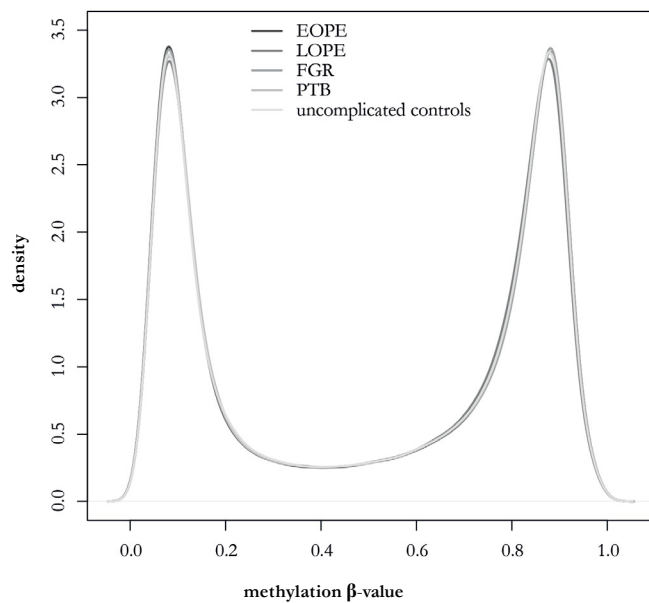
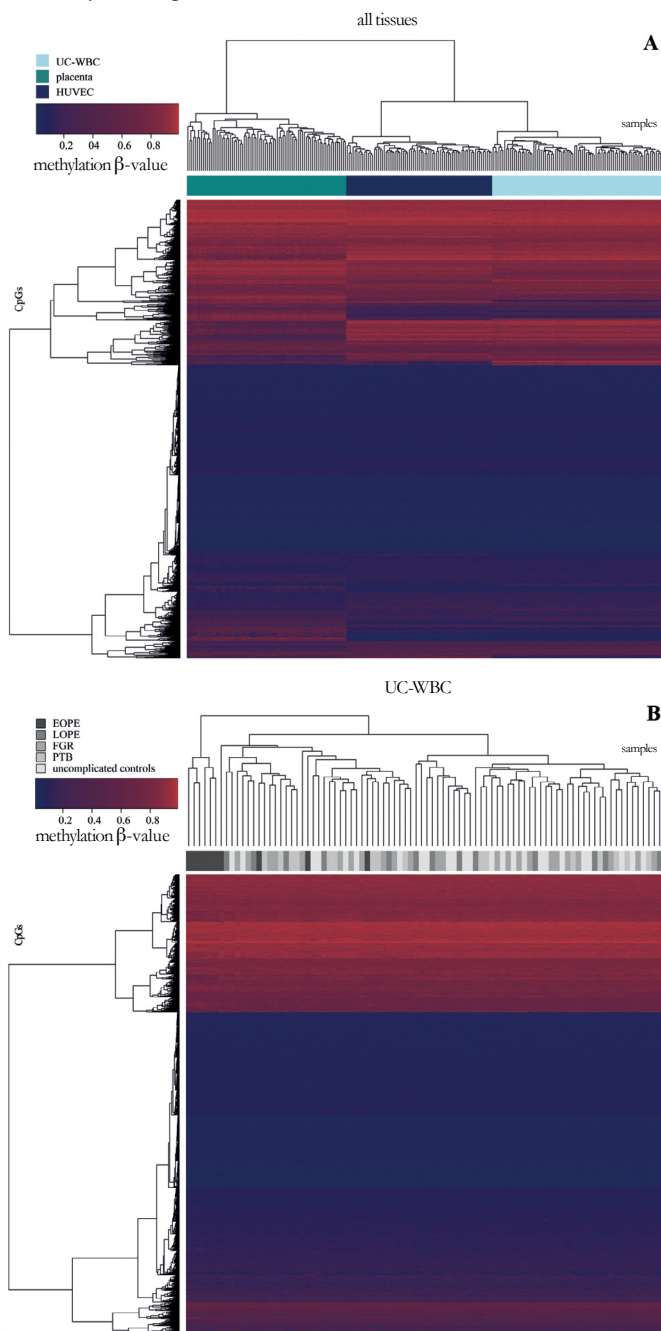


FIGURE 3. Heatmap based on clustering of methylation (β -value) of all differentially methylated CpGs.



Heatmap plots show the clustering results of the EWAS using all significant CpGs in all tissues (A), UC-WBC samples (B), placental samples (C) and HUVEC samples (D). Samples are plotted on the horizontal axis and CpGs on the vertical axis. Samples cluster between the different tissues (A) and between EOPE and the (un) complicated control groups in UC-WBC samples (B). β -values are depicted for a better biological understanding of the figure.

EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth; UC-WBC umbilical cord white blood cells; HUVEC human umbilical vein endothelial cells.

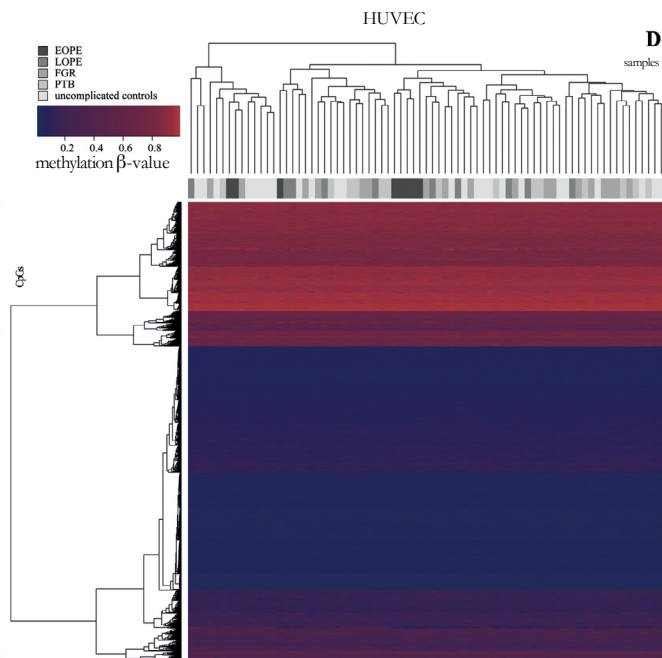
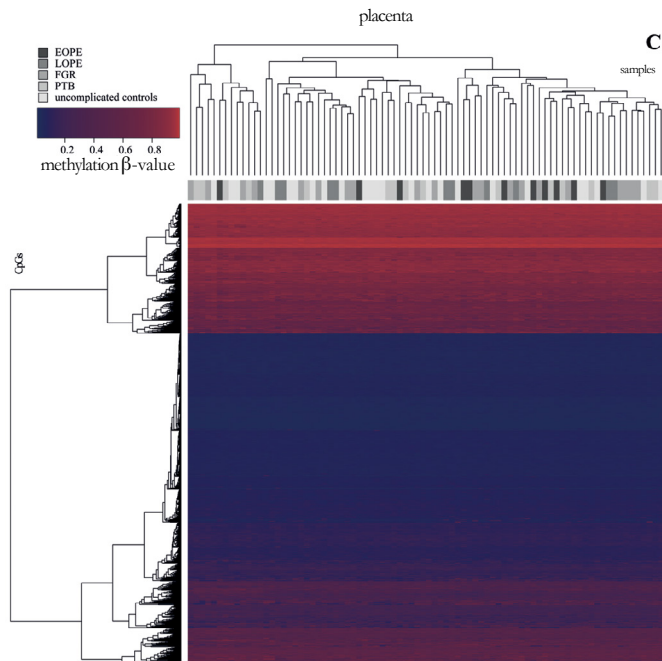
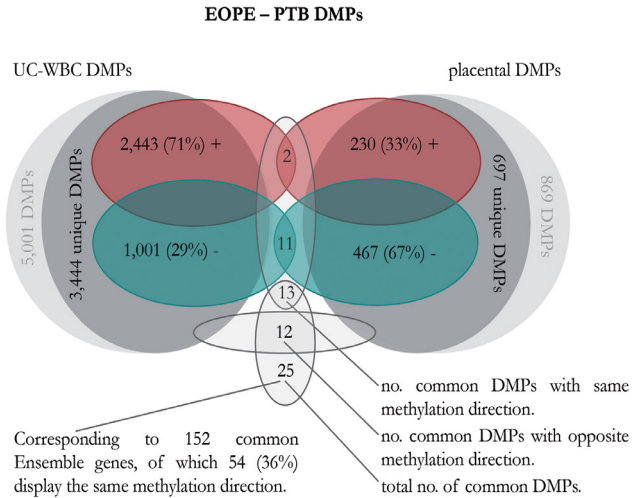


FIGURE 4. Venn diagram of the number of (overlapping) UC-WBC- and placental DMPs in EOPE compared with PTB complicated pregnancies.



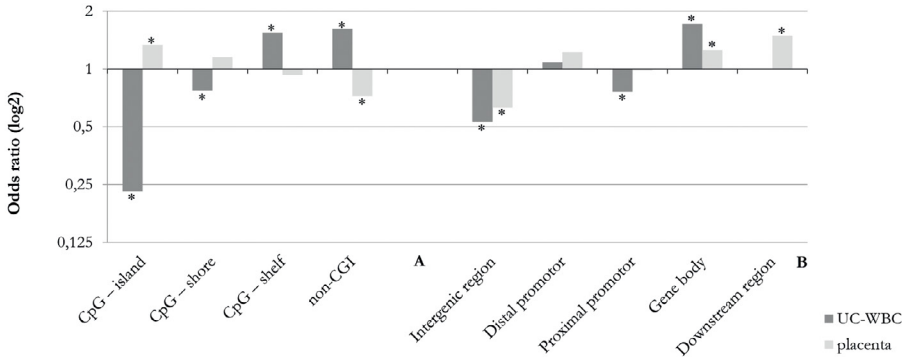
Red circles display the number of hypermethylated DMPs relative to PTB (+), green circles display the number of hypomethylated DMPs relative to PTB (-). *UC-WBC* umbilical cord white blood cells; *DMPs* differentially methylated positions; *EOPE* early-onset preeclampsia; *PTB* preterm birth; *n*, number of.

RAS-activity, inflammatory responses and erythrocyte development. After excluding those DMPs that were mapped to transcripts instead of genes, DAVID mapped 536 placental DMP genes and revealed enriched GO term involvement in embryogenesis, regulation of transcription and cellular differentiation. UC-WBC and placental highest enriched GO terms are presented in **Table 2**.

Ingenuity Pathway Analysis (IPA) of DMP genes. We applied IPA to validate the GO findings from DAVID. Ingenuity software mapped 3,011 UC-WBC DMP genes and a canonical pathway analysis identified enrichment of top-ranked pathways all involved in cascade-signalling mechanisms. We further conducted network analyses, which revealed that the top networks were mainly associated with cardiovascular system development, cellular function and development, haematological system development and infectious diseases.

596 placental DMP genes were mapped by Ingenuity, of which enriched canonical pathways did not reach statistical significance. The top ten enriched networks were mainly associated with embryonic development, cellular development, regulation of gene expression, cardiovascular system development,

FIGURE 5. UC-WBC- and placental- DMP enrichment in the CpG-density (A) and gene-centric (B) annotation, in EOPE compared to PTB complicated pregnancies.



A. DMP annotation relative to CpG islands showed exactly opposite patterns for UC-WBC as compared to placental DMPs with the strongest enrichment in non-CpG island regions and strongest depletion in CpG islands in UC-WBC versus strongest enrichment in CpG island regions and strongest depletion in non-CpG islands in placenta.

B. DMP annotation relative to genes, revealed strongest enrichment in gene body regions, with additional high enrichment in downstream regions of the placenta. A strong depletion of DMPs in intergenic regions was observed in both UC-WBC and placental tissue.

* $p < 0.05$. UC-WBC umbilical cord white blood cells; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; PTB preterm birth; non-CGI non-CpG island; DMP differentially methylated position.

cell death and survival and haematological system development. The highest enriched pathways and networks are presented in **Table 3**.

DISCUSSION

In this study we demonstrate significant differences in genome-wide UC-WBC and placental DNA methylation between EOPE and PTB controls but not between EOPE and FGR controls or uncomplicated controls. Significant differences were also not found between LOPE and all other (un)complicated control pregnancies. **EOPE differential methylation in comparison to PTB, in UC-WBC and placental tissue.** Our most evident observation was the large difference in the level of differential methylation observed in EOPE but not in LOPE. This may be best explained by the excessive oxidative stress exposure in EOPE and LOPE pregnancies, suggested to be highly involved in the disturbance of epigenetic programming¹⁵. In response to various forms of stress, cells increase the production of important protective proteins while reducing the translation of other less relevant proteins to restore cellular homeostasis¹². We observed both hyper- and

TABLE 2. Top 10 DAVID GO Functional annotation clusters of EOPE UC-WBC- and placental DMP nearest genes

UC-WBC	Enrichment score
1. Phosphorylation	4.6
2. Programming of cell death	3.9
3. Cytoskeleton organization	3.9
4. Positive regulation of gene expression	3.6
5. Regulation of RAS (GTPase) activity	3.3
6. Endocytose	2.8
7. Regulation of phosphate metabolic process	2.7
8. Defence/inflammatory response	2.4
9. Erythrocyte differentiation and development	2.1
10. Regulation of endocytosis and phagocytosis	2.0
Placenta	Enrichment score
1. Embryonic development	7.3
2. Regulation of transcription	7.2
3. Neuron development	6.3
4. Embryonic morphogenesis	5.7
5. Positive regulation of transcription	4.9
6. Negative regulation of transcription	4.2
7. Embryonic morphogenesis	4.1
8. Respiratory development	3.9
9. Regulation of cell differentiation and development	3.5
10. Embryonic development: dorsal/ventral pattern formation	3.4

UC-WBC- and placental DMPs in EOPE were mapped to the nearest gene using Ensembl annotations from UCSC database. Assigned Ensembl genes were uploaded to the DAVID tool to examine possible enrichment of corresponding GO terms using the GO_BP_FAT annotation category. Fisher Exact was applied to measure the gene-enrichment of annotated GO terms of the uploaded gene list, against the whole human genome list as a background. To focus on the biology of the annotated GO terms, clusters of similar annotations were examined from the DAVID Functional annotation Clustering table tool. The clustering algorithm is based on the hypothesis that similar annotations have similar gene members, resulting in a Group Enrichment Score to rank their biological significance, which is based on the Fisher Exact p-values of each GO term within the cluster. The higher the enrichment score, the more enriched.

DMPs differentially methylated positions; DAVID Database for Annotation, Visualization and Integrated Discovery; GO-term, gene-ontology term; HUVEC human umbilical vein endothelial cells.

hypomethylation in association with EOPE in UC-WBC and placenta tissue, and enrichment of both positive and negative regulation of transcription among the functional annotations of DMP genes, in line with these cellular stress responses. Moreover, if cellular stress responses fail or a sudden excessive stress event occurs, cellular death might occur, through apoptosis or necrosis¹³. Also this cellular death- and survival pathway was identified among the DMP gene functional annotations, underlining the potential involvement of excessive oxidative stress.

TABLE3. Top 10 Ingenuity networks and pathways of EOPE UC-WBC- and placental DMP nearest genes

UC-WBC Canonical pathways	-log p-value
1. Molecular Mechanisms of Cancer	4,49
2. Tec Kinase Signalling	4,37
3. Relaxin Signalling	4,37
4. IL-1 Signalling	4,00
5. Fcγ Receptor-mediated Phagocytosis in Macrophages and Monocytes	3,87
6. PPAR Signalling	3,78
7. Renal Cell Carcinoma Signalling	3,74
8. G Beta Gamma Signalling	3,67
9. G-Protein Coupled Receptor Signalling	3,67
10. HGF Signalling	3,49
UC-WBC networks	Score
1. Cardiovascular System Development and Function, Lymphoid Tissue Structure and Development, Cell Morphology	29/35
2. Cardiovascular System Development and Function, Tissue Morphology, Cellular Movement	26/34
3. Cell Cycle, Cellular Development, Haematological System Development and Function	24/33
4. Connective Tissue Disorders, Developmental Disorder, Skeletal and Muscular Disorders	24/33
5. Cancer, Organismal Injury and Abnormalities, RNA Post-Transcriptional Modification	24/33
6. Cardiovascular Disease, Cellular Compromise, Organismal Injury and Abnormalities	23/32
7. Infectious Diseases, Antigen Presentation, Protein Synthesis	23/32
8. RNA Damage and Repair, Post-Translational Modification, Cellular Development	23/32
9. Cell Morphology, Cellular Function and Maintenance, Infectious Diseases	23/32
10. Cancer, Organismal Injury and Abnormalities, Reproductive System Disease	23/32
placental networks	Score
1. Embryonic Development, Hereditary Disorder, Neurological Disease	45/32
2. Cellular Development, Cellular Growth and Proliferation, Organismal Development	36/28
3. Gene Expression, Cancer, Organismal Injury and Abnormalities	36/28
4. Cell Cycle, Cellular Movement, Developmental Disorder	30/25
5. Cardiovascular System Development and Function, Cellular Movement, Carbohydrate Metabolism	25/22
6. Molecular Transport, Inflammatory Response, Haematological System Development and Function	14/15
7. Metabolic Disease, Organismal Injury and Abnormalities, Respiratory Disease	12/14
8. Cellular Development, Cellular Growth and Proliferation, Cellular Movement	12/14
9. Cell Death and Survival, Cell Cycle, Cellular Assembly and Organization	12/14
10. Cell Death and Survival, Cardiovascular System Development and Function, Cell Morphology	12/14

Ingenuity pathway analysis was performed with the annotated UC-WBC- and placental DMP Ensembl gene lists in EOPE with focus on canonical pathways and networks. Enriched canonical pathways were calculated using the Fisher's Exact test and subjected to Benjamini-Hochberg procedure for controlling FDR ($p < 0.05$). Networks were generated based on network eligible molecules, which were encoded by our DMP genes and also interact with other molecules in the Ingenuity Pathways Knowledge Base. A high score for a network indicates a more approximate fit between network eligible molecules and the molecules that constitute the network, calculated using the right-tailed Fisher's Exact Test. No significant EOPE placental canonical pathways were observed.

DMPs differentially methylated positions; HUVEC human umbilical vein endothelial cells; FDR, false discovery rate.

From our data it appears that oxidative stress may have more consequences for EOPE pregnancies, where placental and newborn tissues are indeed subjected to this adverse exposure from early pregnancy onwards. In EOPE, chorionic villi are exposed to oxidative stress at 8-9 weeks of gestation through contact with maternal oxygenated blood due to early unplugging of spiral arteries, disturbing the formation of the definitive placenta by restricted invasion and impaired remodelling of spiral arteries ¹². One might hypothesize that the epigenetic programming involved in this initial placental formation and differentiation is in fact already affected, perhaps inducing the further development of EOPE, rather than being a consequence of the disease. We suggest that perhaps the very initial process of epigenetic reprogramming between fertilisation and formation of the blastocyst is already affected in EOPE, explaining the observed extensive involvement of placental DMPs and also suggesting a more causative epigenetic involvement. In general, impaired placentation seems to play a much larger role in the pathophysiology of EOPE than LOPE, with more adverse consequences for the fetus, such as FGR, supporting the current results ¹¹. Also the maternal and fetal pro-inflammatory milieu is more pronounced in EOPE than in LOPE, with more potential consequences for UC-WBC epigenetic programming, as substantiated by our data ¹⁵.

Although we would have expected to establish some degree of differential methylation in LOPE, the lack of differential methylation is in accordance to previous literature ^{152, 153, 160-162}. Only Zhu et al. identified DMRs in placental tissue of severe LOPE pregnancies as compared to that of gestational age- and parity-matched controls. They however used different techniques (DNA immunoprecipitation and deep sequencing) and included only severe cases of LOPE, potentially explaining the discrepancy with our findings ¹⁵⁶.

A possible reason for observing associations between EOPE and PTB only, is that these two groups are least affected by a larger gestational age range and additional comorbidity and hence easier to compare than the other control groups. The lack of any significantly differential methylation in HUVEC obtained from EOPE pregnancies might be partly explained by the decreased power as a result of the lower HUVEC sample size (n=8) and the larger variation, compared to (un)complicated controls.

The majority of DMPs in placental tissue was hypomethylated, which is substantiated by literature ^{153, 160-163}, whereas the more prominent hypermethylation in UC-WBC is in contrast to previous studies ^{154, 164}. These

studies did not adjust for potential confounders such as gestational age or leucocyte-count, which may explain the discrepancy of the results. Compared to the total number of DMPs, the relatively small shared set of 25 DMPs and 152 corresponding genes suggests that UC-WBC and placenta are behaving rather differently in association to EOPE. This is substantiated by the fact that only 52% of the shared DMPs and 36% of the shared genes in UC-WBC and placental tissue are behaving in the same methylation direction relative to PTB, and by the opposite enrichment patterns described below. In certain overlapping genes it appears that different CpGs are affected in UC-WBC than in placental tissue.

CpG-density- and gene-centric enrichment of EOPE UC-WBC- and placental DMPs. Enrichment analysis of the identified EOPE DMPs showed opposite patterns for the positions of UC-WBC- and placental DMPs relative to CpG-islands. EOPE was associated with strong differential methylation of non-CpG island regions in UC-WBC and depletion in CpG islands, whereas in placental tissue differential methylation was observed in CpG islands and depletion in non-CpG islands, which is in line with previous studies^{153, 154}. Evidence emerges that CpG island methylation is mostly associated with long-term repression of gene expression such as imprinting, which is an important process for normal placental development^{22, 23}. Indeed, a supporting role of imprinting in the development of PE has been observed in previous studies¹⁶⁵.

UC-WBC- and placental DMPs display strong enrichment in gene bodies and evident depletion in intergenic regions. Previous studies describe enrichment of EOPE DMPs in placental enhancer- and UC-WBC ‘open sea’-regions, classified according to the Illumina gene-centric annotation which is not directly comparable to our UCSC gene-centric annotation results. Gene body regions seem to be more susceptible to variation in DNA methylation, and may therefore represent interesting genomic regions for future epidemiologic epigenetic association studies²³. Because methylation of gene bodies is generally associated with stimulation of transcription, the strong placental hypomethylation suggests mainly repression of transcription and the contrary for UC-WBC²³.

GO-term enrichment and IPA of EOPE DMP genes. DMP GO functional annotations demonstrated that genes linked to UC-WBC DMPs were involved in many processes associated with the pathogenesis of PE, such as regulation of inflammatory responses and RAS-activity^{3, 166}. We and others have previously described decreased leucocytes and increased nucleated red blood cells in EOPE UC-WBC, indeed suggesting inflammatory response involvement and disturbed fetal haematopoiesis^{53, 167}. Therefore, of particular interest is the enriched GO

term of erythrocyte development. The observed enriched GO-term of cellular death regulation might be related to flawing of the endothelial vessel wall in PE, causing apoptosis of endothelial cells, which has been related to the increased presence of endothelial microparticles in PE ¹⁵. One of the most enriched UC-WBC GO terms covers a broad spectrum of cell signalling processes involved in many general processes, which is likely a result of general excessive oxidative stressors. The latter was confirmed by all highest significant canonical pathways from IPA. Placental DMP GO functions covered general functions such as cellular differentiation and cell death, embryogenesis and regulation of gene expression, which is in agreement to the impaired placentation and compromised fetal growth in EOPE and substantiated by literature ¹⁵³.

The involvement of DNA methylation differences in cardiovascular programming of PE offspring was strongly suggested by many identified gene-ontology (GO) functional annotations and pathways associated with the DMP genes. Repeated enrichment of IPA genetic networks associated with development of cardiovascular and metabolic disease was observed. This is partly substantiated by previous PE EWAS, describing differential methylation in the fatty acid synthase pathway and in collagen-related genes ^{152, 154}. There exists partial overlap between identified genes in association with EOPE in previous EWAS in both UC-WBC and placental DMP-genes, as depicted in **Supplementary table 3**. We believe these overlapping genes might represent interesting loci for further research and suggest a certain degree of reproducibility of our results. Yuen et al identified hypomethylation of the *TIMP3* gene in EOPE placentas, suggesting reduced angiogenesis and trophoblast invasiveness by use of the Illumina GoldenGate Methylation assay ¹⁶². In other vascular-related candidate gene studies, altered DNA methylation in association with PE was found of *LEP*, *VEGF*, *FLT-1*, *KDR*-genes and collagen-metabolism genes ^{161, 163, 168}, substantiating the role of disturbed vascular programming in PE. All of these previously identified candidate genes were also present among our DMPs in UC-WBC and/or placental tissue.

Several studies have demonstrated that epigenetic programming may indeed be involved in the development of cardiovascular disease, as reviewed by Casanello et al. ²¹. One of these studies showed increased DNA methylation of estrogen receptor beta promoters in endothelial cells of atherosclerotic plaques ¹⁶⁹. Alexander et al. showed that in smooth muscle cells epigenetic mechanisms were involved in the phenotypic switch to less contractility with vascular dysfunction as a result ¹⁷⁰.

Strengths and limitations. The design of our EWAS is unique in that it addresses tissue-specific methylation levels of EOPE and LOPE and uses both uncomplicated and FGR- and PTB-complicated normotensive control pregnancies. The different tissues were obtained mostly from the same pregnancies and therefore the data provide novel insights in the tissue-specific epigenome-wide DNA-methylation in PE-exposed newborn tissues. Moreover, we adjusted for gestational age and UC-WBC cell mixtures^{36, 162}, which has not often been done in previous studies^{152, 154, 155}. The UC-WBC cell populations were however partly estimated, based on our own and external populations. Our description of the standardised tissue sampling is more extensive than in most other studies, and this is relevant because the method of tissue sampling can be an important potential confounder or effect modifier of DNA methylation^{171, 172}.

Inherent to the observational and case-control character of the study, residual confounding cannot be fully excluded. The addition of birthweight as potential confounder did not improve our statistical model and was discarded also because of the limited sample size. Moreover, we had no expression data to validate our findings and the external validity is reduced by the relatively high presence of comorbidities in uncomplicated controls in our tertiary hospital setting. Our findings could have improved with the use of larger sample sizes and homogeneous cell types of placental tissue (and UC-WBC), thereby avoiding potential confounding by cell mixture variation^{134, 135}.

Conclusion. We found a large number of genome-wide DMPs in UC-WBC and placental tissue that were associated with EOPE. The enrichment in several cardiovascular system developmental pathways implies that epigenetic programming may be an underlying mechanism explaining the association with increased cardiovascular disease risks in EOPE offspring. Future follow-up studies in offspring should address whether these pathways represent potential targets for intervention or prevention of the enhanced cardiovascular disease susceptibility.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Appendix 1.

Data collection. Immediately after delivery of the newborn, UC-WBC samples from the umbilical vein were collected in anticoagulant vacutainer tubes (Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) with the placenta still in situ. The complete umbilical cord was cut at the placental insertion and immediately stored in umbilical cord buffer (HBSS with 1 % penicillin/streptomycin) at 4 to 8 °C until further HUVEC isolation within 24 hours after delivery. Umbilical cord and placental samples were collected within 10 minutes after delivery of the placenta. Placental samples of 0.5 cm³ were taken from the fetal side of the villi at four different sites in a 3 cm radius around the umbilical cord insertion, after carefully removing the membranes and 2 mm of the top placental layer. After washing in phosphate buffered saline-solution (PBS) to remove maternal blood, placental samples were snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80 °C until DNA extraction. All samples were collected by trained researchers.

UC-WBC processing. UC-WBC vacutainer tubes were stored at 4 to 8 °C and processed within 48 hours after delivery. Total white blood cells were isolated after centrifugation of the vacutainer tubes. The white blood cell-pellets were stored at -80 °C until DNA extraction.

HUVEC isolation. The umbilical cord vein was connected to infusion tubes on both extremes and rinsed with cord buffer. Once all remaining umbilical cord blood was removed, the umbilical vein was filled with collagenase solution (1mg/ml) and incubated for 15 minutes in a PBS water bath at 37 °C. Detached HUVEC were obtained in suspension and further purified by magnetic activated cell separation (MACS) with CD146 MACS MicroBeads (Miltenyi Biotec GmbH, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany). PBS washed HUVEC cell pellets were snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80 °C until DNA extraction.

DNA extraction. Thawed WBC pellets were subjected to erythrocyte lysis by use of an Erythrocyte Lysis Buffer (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany), following manufacturer's protocols. Thirty mg frozen placental tissue was grinded manually on dry ice using a tissue grinder. The powder was immediately added to a cell lysis buffer and stored at -80 °C until further processing. Subsequently, genomic DNA was extracted from all tissues using the Allprep DNA/RNA isolation mini kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany), according to manufacturer's instructions.

Appendix 2.

Data quality control and pre-processing. All data pre-processing and statistical analyses were performed in R software version 3.2.2 and Bioconductor version 3.1¹⁴¹. We checked performance of built-in internal quality controls in the Control Dashboard using the methylation module of GenomeStudio (Illumina Inc., San Diego, USA). It included a sample call rate check, colour balance check and control dashboard checks. Probes targeting a CpG with documented single-nucleotide polymorphisms in the C or G nucleotides were removed (n=17,196) (Minor allele frequency > 0.05, European population, 1000 Genomes Project). Probes directed at the sex chromosomes (n=11,648) and with a detection P value >0.01 in more than 1% of samples (n=2,773) were also excluded. Out of all 485,512 probes, a total of 454,892 were left for further analysis. Normalisation was performed for all samples together by the Dasen method, which consists of background adjustment and between-array normalization, applied to Type I and Type II probes separately (Bioconductor package watermelon version 1.80)¹⁴².

Appendix 3.

CpG-density- and gene-centric enrichment analysis of DMPs. DMPs were annotated according to their position relative to CpG-islands and relative to genes using UCSC-database. In relation to CpG islands, we identified CpG shores as the 2 kb CpG island flanking region and shelves as the 2 kb CpG shore flanking region. Remaining DMPs were annotated as non-CpG island regions¹²¹. Relative to genes, DMPs were annotated as gene body (+500 basepairs (bp) to 3' end of the gene), distal promotor (> 10 to 1.5 kb from the nearest TSS), proximal promotor (-1.5 to +500 bp from the nearest TSS), intergenic (> 10kb from the nearest TSS), and downstream regions (3' end to +5 kb from 3' end). Human genome build 37 was used for all annotations. The DMP enrichment analyses were performed using the selected 43,488 UC-WBC probes and 134,700 placental probes, respectively.

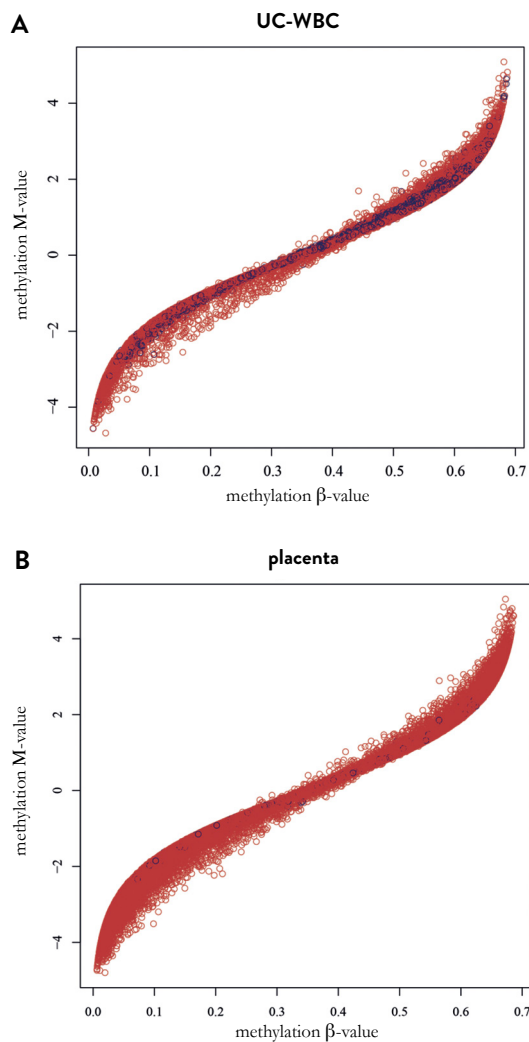
Gene Ontology (GO) term enrichment analysis and Ingenuity Pathway Analysis (IPA) of DMP genes. UC-WBC- and placental DMPs were mapped to the nearest gene based on Ensemble annotations from UCSC, also when facing multiple genes. Assigned Ensembl genes were uploaded to the DAVID

tool to examine possible enrichment of corresponding GO terms using the GO_BP_FAT annotation category (DAVID Bioinformatics Resources 6.7, <http://david.abcc.ncifcrf.gov/>)^{149, 150}. Fisher Exact was applied to measure the gene-enrichment of annotated GO terms of the uploaded gene list, against the whole human genome list as a background. To focus on the biology of the annotated GO terms, clusters of similar annotations were examined from the DAVID Functional annotation Clustering table tool. The clustering algorithm is based on the hypothesis that similar annotations have similar gene members, resulting in a Group Enrichment Score to rank their biological significance.

We additionally conducted IPA with the annotated DMP Ensembl gene lists to validate the DAVID enrichment and focussed on canonical pathways and networks. Associated canonical pathways were subjected to Benjamini-Hochberg procedure for controlling FDR ($p < 0.05$). Networks were generated based on network eligible molecules, which were encoded by our DMP genes and also interact with other molecules in the Ingenuity Pathways Knowledge Base. A high score for a network indicates a more approximate fit between network eligible molecules and the molecules that constitute the network, calculated using the right-tailed Fisher's Exact Test.

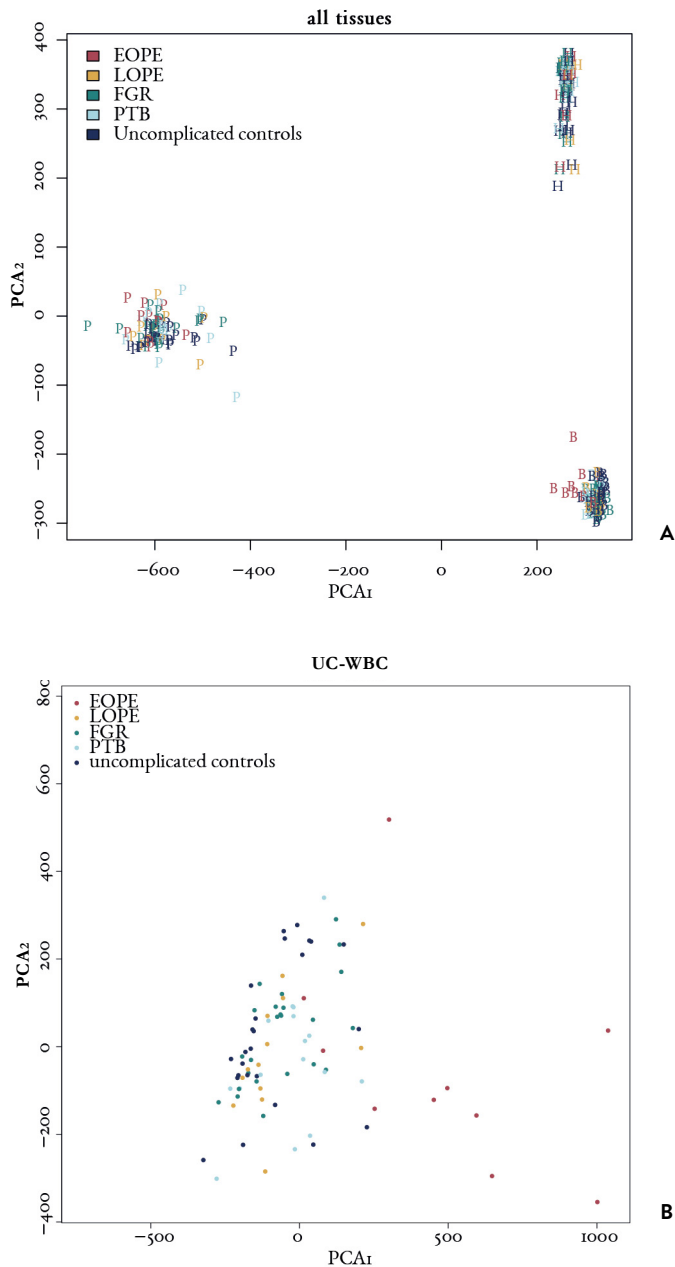
To check the reproducibility of our DMPs we compared our results to three previous EWAS with available DMP datasets and similar study designs with respect to patients and tissues. We were able to compare our DMPs in UC-WBC to results of Ching et al and our DMPs in placental tissue to Blair et al and Anton et al by using jvenn web application^{148, 152-154}.

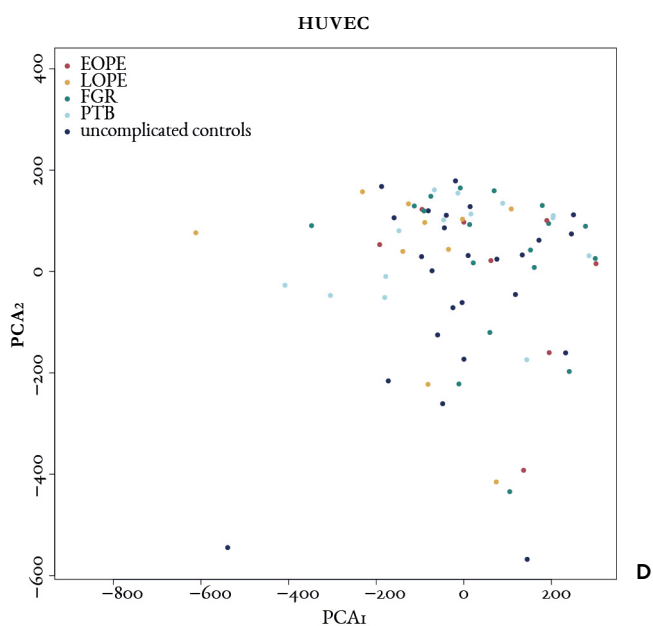
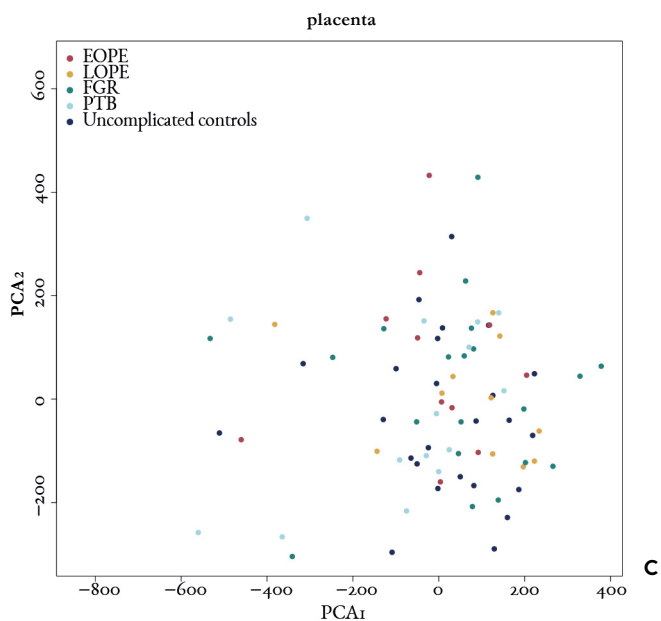
SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 1. Relation of methylation β -value and M-value and visualisation of genome-wide significantly differentially methylated CpGs (represented as red dots) and insignificant CpGs (represented as blue dots) in UC-WBC (A) and placenta (B).



The vast majority of statistical significant CpGs were represented on the M-value scale with a linear correlation to the β -scale; that is between 0.2 and 0.8 methylation on the β -scale. This enabled using a single effect-size M-value cut-off without introducing a bias based on the absence of linearity between M- and β -values in the methylation extremities. *UC-WBC* umbilical cord white blood cells.

SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE 2. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of EOPE, LOPE and (un)complicated control pregnancies.





PCA plots show the results of the EWAS using all tissues (A), using only UC-WBC samples (B), using only placental samples (C) and using only HUVEC samples (D). Each dot represents a single patient sample. Red dots represent EOPe-, dark blue dots represent LOPE-, black dots represent uncomplicated control-, green dots represent FGR- and light blue dots represent PTB samples. Distinct clustering is observed between different tissues (A) and between EOPe and (un)complicated controls in UC-WBC samples (B). *EOPe* early-onset preeclampsia; *LOPE* late-onset preeclampsia; *FGR* fetal growth restriction; *PTB* preterm birth; *UC-WBC* umbilical cord white blood cells; *HUVEC* human umbilical vein endothelial cells.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 1. UC-WBC cell leucocyte counts

	EOPE	LOPE	Uncomplicated controls	Complicated controls	
				Normotensive FGR	Normotensive PTB
	(n=13)	(n=16)	(n=36)	(n=27)	(n=20)
Total leucocytes (x10 ⁹ /L)	6.39 (2.14)	12.41* (2.92)	13.67* (3.57)	12.38* (3.74)	10.38 (5.40)
Missings of total group	7	7	9	9	8
Missings of group with UC-WBC	4	4	8	6	5
Imputed total leucocytes (x10 ⁹ /L)	6.43 (2.11)	11.98 (3.4)	13.22 (3.96)	12.96 (4.17)	9.61 (4.60)

Data are presented as mean (standard deviation).

UC-WBC umbilical cord white blood cells; EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 2. Number of EOPE DMPs per comparison with different effect-size cut-off values

Effect-size cut-off	EOPE - unc. controls placenta	EOPE - unc. controls HUVEC	EOPE - FGR placenta	EOPE - PTB UC-WBC	EOPE - PTB placenta
None	1 (7x10 ⁻⁶ %)	1 (2x10 ⁻⁵ %)	1 (7x10 ⁻⁶ %)	12,040 (28 %*)	5,668 (0.5 %*)
Hypomethylated	1	1	1	3,457 (29 %)	4,684 (83 %)
Hypermethylated	0	0	0	8,583 (71 %)	984 (17 %)
12.5 % β ~ 0.8 m-value	1	1	1	5,001	869
(Without duplicate DMPs)				3,444	697
Hypomethylated				1,417 (28 %)	566 (65 %)
(Hypomethylated without duplicate DMPs)				1,001 (29 %)	467 (67 %)
Hypermethylated				3,584 (72 %)	303 (35 %)
(Hypermethylated without duplicate DMPs)				2443 (71 %)	230 (33 %)
20 % β ~ 1.3 m-value	1	1	1	569	58

EOPE DMPs versus (un)complicated control groups per tissue. No LOPE DMPs were identified. The effect-size cut-off value 12.5 % β ~ 0.8 m-value and corresponding DMPs depicted in bold were applied during final data analysis

EOPE early-onset preeclampsia; LOPE late-onset preeclampsia; FGR fetal growth restriction; PTB preterm birth; UC-WBC Umbilical Cord Blood; HUVEC Human Umbilical Vein Endothelial Cells; DMPs differentially methylated positions.

* This % is calculated by dividing the number of significant CpGs by the total number of probes used per tissue: n=43,488 UC-WBC probes, n=134,700 placental probes.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 3. is available at the website of the scientific journal in which this part of the thesis has been published.

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE 4. EOPE DMP enrichment in the gene-centric and CpG-density annotation of UC-WBC- and placental DMPs

	EOPE-PTB UC-WBC		EOPE-PTB placenta	
	n (%)	OR (95% CI)	n (%)	OR (95% CI)
DMP enrichment in the gene-centric annotation				
Intergenic region	635 (13 %)	0.53* (0.49-0.58)	151 (17 %)	0.63* (0.53-0.75)
Distal promotor	306 (6 %)	1.08 (0.96-1.23)	63 (7 %)	1.22 (0.93-1.58)
Proximal promotor	1,071 (22 %)	0.76* (0.71-0.82)	231 (27 %)	0.98 (0.84-1.15)
Gene body	2,870 (57 %)	1.71* (1.61-1.82)	393 (45 %)	1.25* (1.09-1.44)
Downstream region	119 (2 %)	1.00 (0.82-1.22)	31 (4 %)	1.49* (1.01-2.14)
DMP enrichment in the CpG-density annotation				
CpG island	213 (4 %)	0.23* (0.20-0.26)	263 (30 %)	1.33* (1.15-1.54)
CpG shore	1,043 (21 %)	0.77* (0.71-0.83)	233 (27 %)	1.15 (0.98-1.34)
CpG shelf	797 (16 %)	1.54* (1.41-1.67)	75 (9 %)	0.93 (0.73-1.18)
non-CpG island	2,948 (59 %)	1.61* (1.52-1.71)	298 (34 %)	0.72* (0.62-0.83)

UC-WBC Umbilical Cord Blood; HUVEC Human Umbilical Vein Endothelial Cells; OR Odds ratio; CI Confidence interval. * p< 0.05.

CHAPTER 9

General discussion

CHAPTER 10

Summary / Samenvatting

De dans van DNA: een aanvulling op de Nederlandse
samenvatting

PART 03



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1998. The public sector has also become an important employer of women, with 60% of public sector employees being women in 1998, compared with 55% in 1980.

There are a number of reasons why the public sector has become an important employer of women. One reason is that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are traditionally held by women, such as teaching, nursing, and social work. Another reason is that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are part-time or flexible, which are more likely to be held by women. A third reason is that the public sector has a high proportion of jobs that are in the service sector, which is also a sector that is traditionally held by women.

The public sector has also become an important employer of women because of the increasing demand for public services. As the population ages, there is a growing need for services such as health care, social care, and education. This has led to an increase in the number of people employed in the public sector, and a corresponding increase in the number of women employed in the public sector.

The public sector has also become an important employer of women because of the increasing demand for flexible working arrangements. Many women have to juggle their work and family commitments, and the public sector has been able to provide a range of flexible working arrangements to meet their needs. This has made the public sector a more attractive employer for women.

The public sector has also become an important employer of women because of the increasing demand for high-quality public services. The public sector has been able to attract and retain a high proportion of women, who are often highly skilled and motivated. This has helped to ensure that the public sector is able to provide high-quality services to the public.

The public sector has also become an important employer of women because of the increasing demand for public services that are delivered by women. Many public services, such as health care, social care, and education, are delivered by women. This has led to an increase in the number of women employed in the public sector, and a corresponding increase in the number of women employed in the public sector.

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CHAPTER 9

General discussion

PE is one of the major pregnancy disorders associated with maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease in later life for both mother and child. In this thesis we have investigated the cardiovascular development and epigenetic programming of placental and newborn tissues after exposure to EOPE and LOPE, in order to provide novel insights into the association with later cardiovascular disease risk, and its underlying mechanisms. The following objectives have been studied:

1. The development of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (a), and of the maternal microcirculation in association with PE (b) (**Part I**)
2. The tissue-specific DNA methylation in placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (**Part II**)

We have performed flow-cytometric, histological and (genome-wide) epigenetic analysis. The main findings, the clinical implications and directions for future research are discussed below.

MAIN FINDINGS

1a. The association between EOPE and LOPE and a disturbed development of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues

During embryonic and fetal development, haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis are closely related and influenced by environmental conditions, such as blood flow, oxygen tension, oxidative stress and epigenetic factors^{52, 21}. We observed that EOPE exposure is associated with disturbed haematopoiesis by revealing a four to sevenfold decrease of neutrophil count and fivefold increase of NRBC count in UCB (**chapter 2**). Additionally, we found that PE exposure was associated with a smaller umbilical vein area and vein wall thickness and LOPE with a larger placental width (**chapter 3**).

These findings suggest that PE exposure results in poor intrauterine conditions that are related to a disturbed development of both haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis. In PE pregnancies, early placental morphology is assumed to be characterised by superficial trophoblast invasion and insufficient remodelling of spiral arteries in the myometrium, causing suboptimal placentation with episodes of placental hypoxia and reperfusion³¹. As a result, the production of inflammatory cytokines in the maternal and fetal circulation increases, which promotes the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) by up to 40% in comparison to normal placentas^{31, 51}. The developing embryo and fetus are thus

exposed to excessive levels of oxidative stress, partly because the suboptimal placenta during PE also displays a reduced antioxidant capacity³¹. Various important developmental processes are however dependent on tightly controlled oxidative stress exposure, such as cellular signalling, differentiation and proliferation^{12, 195}. Haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis are therefore believed to be highly affected by the excessive oxidative stress exposure during PE pregnancies. Especially the vascular endothelium is known to be extremely susceptible to oxidative damage, due to its low cytoprotective capacity, as demonstrated in rodents³¹.

Not only the exposure of tissues to excessive oxidative stress, but also to the dysbalance of angiogenic and antiangiogenic factors of placental origin could contribute to the disturbance of several developmental processes, later in pregnancy. The antiangiogenic factors soluble fms-like tyrosine kinase-1, (sFlt-1, also known as soluble vascular growth factor (VEGF) receptor -1) and soluble endoglin (sEng) are increased in plasma of PE patients. sFlt-1 and sEng promote vascular dysfunction, capillary permeability, liver dysfunction and neurological abnormalities via antagonisation of proangiogenic factors such as VEGF and placental growth factor (PlGF) and are therefore potential underlying factors for especially the decreased umbilical vein wall thickness in PE^{12, 31}. In chapter 8 of this thesis we describe lower DNA methylation of *PlGF* in EOPE exposed placental tissue, supporting the involvement of these (anti)angiogenetic factors in our data.

Furthermore, the exposure to excessive oxidative stress and (anti) angiogenic factors results in a general enhanced inflammatory state of the maternal and fetal circulation, inducing endothelial cell dysfunction. Because prenatal haematopoiesis originates from endothelial cells in the ventral aorta of the developing embryo, fetal endothelial damage may therefore not only affect fetal vasculogenesis, but also the maturation and development of fetal haematopoiesis. Another reason to suggest a close relationship between disturbed haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis in PE, is the known involvement of placental over-expression of protein HIF-1 α , due to the early suboptimal placental perfusion and prolonged hypoxic placental state in EOPE pregnancies^{59, 60}. HIF-1 α regulates several processes such as angiogenesis, glycolysis and erythropoiesis, through erythropoietin-release⁵⁹. Although we did not measure HIF-1 α , placental over-expression of HIF-1 α may explain both the enhanced NRBC counts in UCB in EOPE and the decreased umbilical vein wall thickness in PE.

Interestingly, the above findings from our clinical studies suggesting disturbed haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis are largely substantiated by

the results of our epigenome-wide analysis in Part II of this thesis, where we observed differential DNA methylation in association with EOPE in placental tissue and umbilical cord white blood cells (UC-WBC), in genes associated with inflammatory responses, haematological system development, erythrocyte differentiation in particular and regulation of cell differentiation and cardiovascular development.

EOPE and LOPE demonstrated pronounced differences in our data on UCB cell populations and morphology of the placenta and umbilical cord, and have been proposed as two distinct disease entities ¹¹. The difference is best understood by the placental involvement in both phenotypes, and is clearly illustrated by the opposite placental measurements in EOPE and LOPE in chapter 3. A negative association was demonstrated with placental weight, length and width in EOPE, dependent of gestational and birth weight, in contrast to a positive association with placental width in LOPE. This discrepancy may be explained by the concept of initial poor and restricted placental development in EOPE, whereas in LOPE, trophoblast dysfunction at the end of gestation may be due to villous overcrowding in large, term placentas without prior pathology ¹³. Additionally, in term placentas an increasing uterine contractility occurs, causing suboptimal intervillous perfusion and a potential degree of hypoxia-reperfusion injury thereby inducing ROS production ¹⁹⁶. Both phenotypes are thus characterised by placental induced generation of excessive oxidative stress, but this occurs much later in gestation in LOPE, explaining why the fully developed fetal haematopoiesis as well as the fully developed umbilical cord (vasculature) at term are less affected in LOPE than in EOPE (**Figure 2A and B, association A1 and B1**).

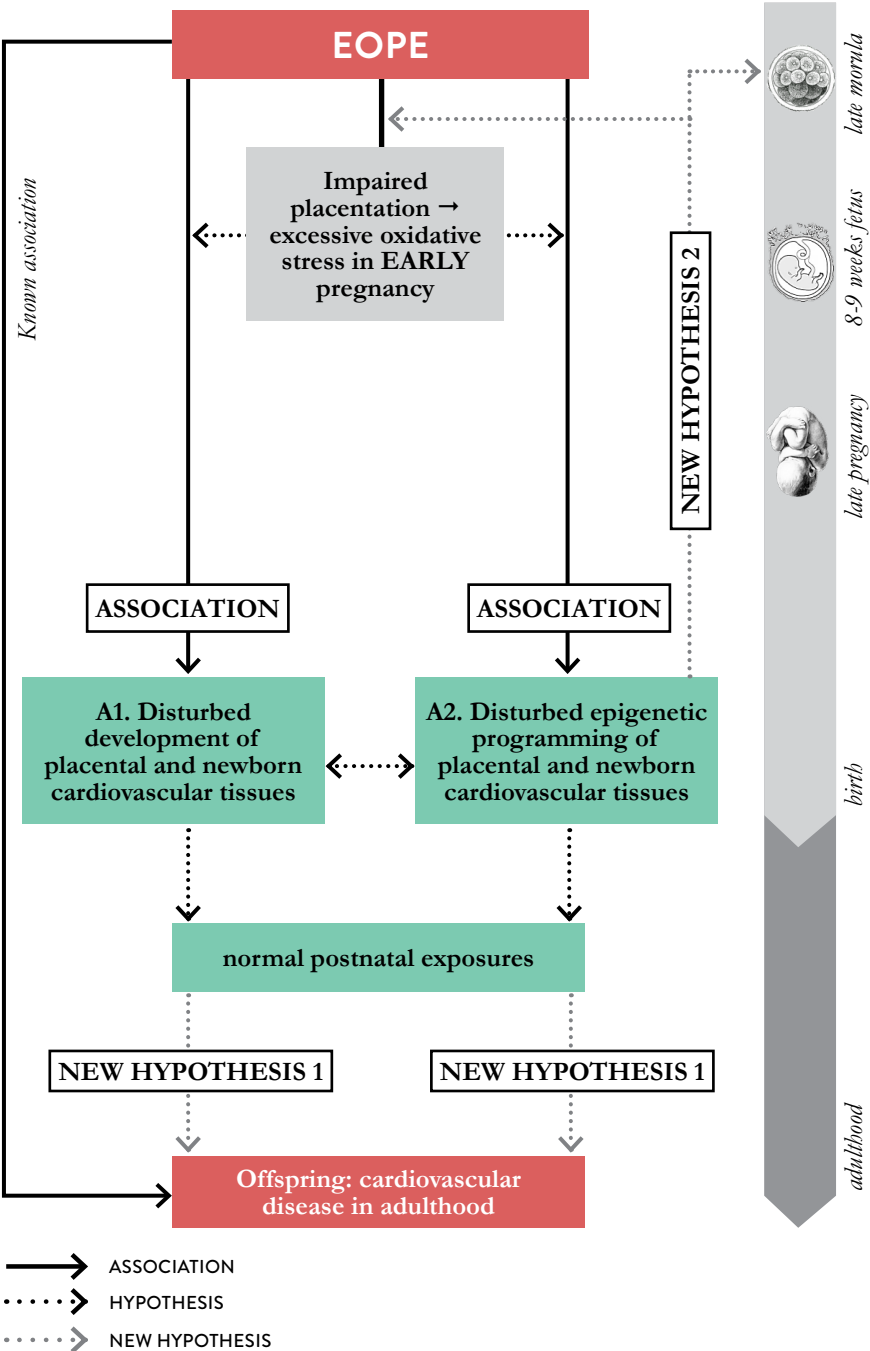
Although EOPE displayed more severe features of disturbed vasculogenesis than LOPE, a higher dependency of gestational age and birth weight was observed. Indeed, also FGR and PTB have been associated with increased cardiovascular risk factors in offspring ^{69, 70}. However, as suggested by our data and that of others, the intrauterine environment in PE complicated pregnancies seems to be unique and exacerbates or acts in synergy with any risks inferred by PTB or FGR ^{7, 197}. The strong significant association with a smaller vein area and wall thickness in the total PE group, independent of gestational age and birth weight, demonstrates that the EOPE and LOPE subgroups may in fact be underpowered. Moreover, the dependency of comorbidities FGR and PTB suggests that the severity of placental pathology is relevant in the

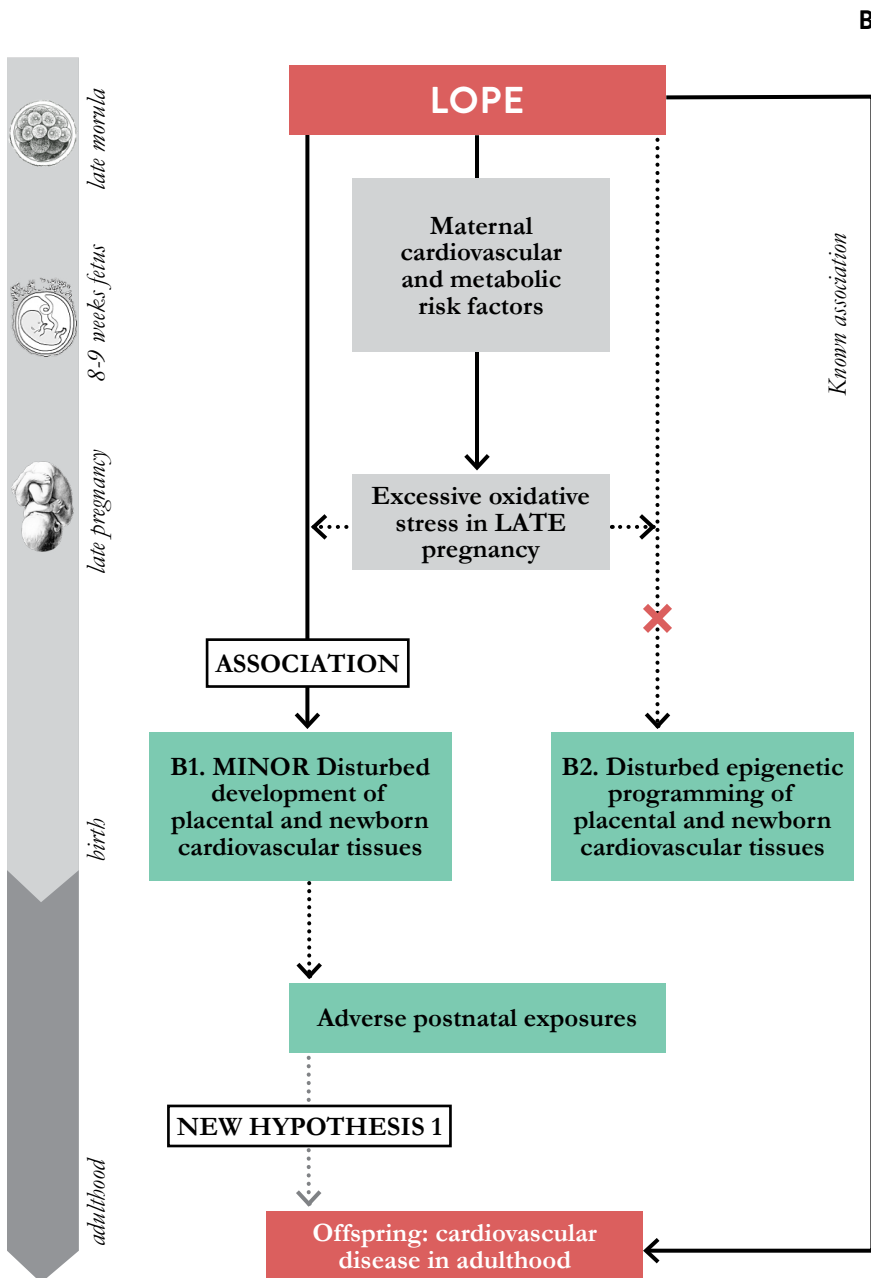
association between EOPE and umbilical vascular alterations. The low rate of FGR cases within the EOPE pregnancies however indicates that a relatively small number of pregnancies complicated by severe placental dysfunction leading to FGR was included, which cannot exclude that the observed association is underestimated.

The combination of disturbed leucocyte and NRBC counts in UCB and a decreased umbilical vein wall thickness may actually represent very early features of the increased cardiovascular risk profile in PE offspring in later life, based on the suggested involvement of the following mechanisms. **Firstly**, the observed altered UCB populations in EOPE suggest the involvement of systemic inflammation, which is known to play an important role in cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome development. **Secondly**, both observations clearly suggest impaired endothelial function, which is confirmed in PE offspring in childhood and adolescence and has been proposed as the mechanistic link between PE and later cardiovascular disease risk ¹⁹⁸⁻²⁰¹. **Thirdly**, the reduced umbilical vein wall thickness may in fact be a proxy for early fetal vascular alterations, explaining why EOPE children have an increased blood pressure or an increased carotid intima media thickness in young adulthood, which is considered a subclinical marker of atherosclerosis ²⁰¹. Concentric remodelling has also been observed by increased cardiac wall thickness measurements in offspring at adolescence. This may not seem in agreement with reduced umbilical vein wall measurements, but could be a compensatory mechanism to the exposure of maternal hypertension in utero or the abnormal uteroplacental haemodynamic state in PE ²⁰². Indeed, a high resistance in the umbilical artery has been associated with low cardiac mass in preschool offspring, substantiating the association between haemodynamics in utero and later structure and function of the cardiovascular system ²⁰³. The observed trend of elastin reduction in the umbilical cord vein in EOPE may be an early feature of arterial stiffness, which is a key determinant of increased blood pressure in adults ²⁰⁴.

Interestingly, the increased risk of high blood pressure and stroke is higher in offspring exposed to EOPE than offspring exposed to LOPE, which is in line with our observations ¹⁹⁷. The current discussion in the literature centers around the potential genetic, behavioural or intrauterine origin of cardiovascular disease development in PE offspring. In response to this discussion, we propose that offspring exposed to EOPE develop a suboptimal cardiovascular phenotype during pregnancy, predisposing them to cardiovascular disease in a relatively

FIGURE 2. A





normal postnatal environment, whereas offspring exposed to LOPE develop a relatively normal cardiovascular phenotype during pregnancy, possibly developing cardiovascular disease merely as an effect of behavioural and environmental risk factors postnatally^{197, 205} (**Figure 2A and B, new hypothesis 1**). This is further substantiated by our PE EWAS findings, demonstrating an evident involvement of differential DNA methylation in genes related to cardiovascular, inflammatory and metabolic pathways, in UC-WBC and placental tissue of EOPE pregnancies only (**Part II**).

1b. The association between PE and maternal microcirculation

In severe PE, maternal endothelial dysfunction can result in haemodynamic instability with possible consequences for microcirculatory functioning³. The microcirculation consists of vessels with a diameter < 100 µm and is essential for oxygen and nutrient exchange, especially at the level of capillaries. Sublingual microcirculation measurements demonstrated that women with severe PE and HELLP syndrome showed a reduced perfused vessel density, a reduced flow velocity and increased heterogeneity of flow in capillaries, compared with women with severe PE without HELLP syndrome. No statistically significant differences were observed in microcirculatory perfusion between severe PE and healthy controls (**chapter 4**).

The reduced density and velocity of capillary perfusion may be a reflection of microvascular erythrocyte fragmentation and platelet adherence to the damaged endothelial surface of narrowed capillaries, explaining the haemolytic aspect and platelet decrease of HELLP syndrome. Heterogeneity of flow is an important and harmful characteristic of impaired microcirculation, suggesting that the number of perfused capillaries is reduced which results in a disturbance of tissue oxygenation. This may be related to the observed endothelial dysfunction five-eight years after delivery in mothers who experienced PE, accompanied by increased inflammatory and antiangiogenic maternal biomarkers such as sFlt-1 and CRP¹⁹⁹. The lack of differences in microvascular measurements between severe PE and healthy controls may be related to the fact that endothelial dysfunction is not equally manifested in all vascular beds during PE, and sublingual microcirculation may not be the most representative site of disease. Sublingual microcirculation is believed to be informative in severe haemodynamic imbalanced conditions like sepsis, shock and cardiac disease, because it reflects the splanchnic circulation given their shared embryologic origin, and splanchnic hypoperfusion is an early indicator of systemic hypoperfusion⁷⁸.

Evidence is emerging that not only macrocirculatory measures such as blood pressure, but also microcirculatory outcome measures are relevant in the light of adult cardiovascular disease development. The risk of maternal cardiovascular disease is particularly high after EOPE pregnancies, where various maternal cardiac and vascular characteristics are disturbed during pregnancy including the impaired uteroplacental blood flow, increased peripheral resistance and reduced cardiac output¹⁹⁷. Because impaired maternal microcirculation seems to be involved in the pathophysiology of severe PE/HELLP syndrome²⁰⁶, this may be an informative measure in light of the cardiovascular disease risk in mothers who experienced PE.

2. The association between EOPE and LOPE and tissue-specific DNA methylation in placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues

Altered programming of the placental and newborn epigenome may be an underlying mechanism for the disturbed development of fetal haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis (**Part I**) and as such, elucidate the association between prenatal PE exposure and cardiovascular disease risk in later life. Because epigenetic programming is essential for lineage differentiation, embryogenesis and placentation in early pregnancy, we aimed to optimize our epigenetic studies by initially addressing the tissue-specific characteristics of DNA methylation in pregnancies without major pregnancy complications such as PE, gestational hypertension, FGR or PTB.

The tissue-specificity of DNA methylation. Firstly we describe significant tissue-specific DNA methylation of imprinted genes *IGF2* in Wharton jelly and *H19* in placental tissue and Wharton jelly, in comparison to UC-WBC methylation patterns. No statistically significant differences were observed between total mean *IGF2/H19* methylation of CD34+ and CD34- UC-MNC fractions (**chapter 5**). Next on a genome-wide level, HUVEC and placental tissue displayed large tissue-specific differences versus UC-WBC in 43% and 73% of the total number of genome-wide measured CpGs respectively, but no differentially methylated regions were identified between UC-MNC and UC-WBC (**chapter 6**).

A comparison between the candidate gene- and genome-wide findings is difficult because we applied different laboratory- and statistical analysis and used different tissues in both studies. However, the similarities between CD34+ and CD34- UC-MNC and between UC-MNC and UC-WBC are in agreement and suggest that DNA methylation levels in different UC-WBC subsets in general seem rather comparable.

The genome-wide analysis revealed the most prominent tissue-specific observations in placental tissue, which is best explained by the time-point of placental-specific development. After fertilisation followed by the global demethylation of the paternally and maternally derived genome, the very first de novo DNA methylation at the late morula-stage determines the initial differential developmental event: lineage separation of the inner cell mass that will give rise to the embryo, and the trophoctoderm that will evolve into most of the placental tissue. Inner cell mass methylation is more pronounced than the relatively hypomethylated trophoctoderm, resulting in an asymmetrical methylation status from this developmental stage onwards^{117, 118, 125}. HUVEC displayed another substantial genome-wide tissue-specific methylation pattern compared to UC-WBC, but less extreme than placental tissue. This can be argued by the fact that HUVEC and the surrounding umbilical cord originate from the inner cell mass¹²⁷, thus displays a more common background with UC-WBC⁵². In line with the extensive amount of identified genome-wide HUVEC and placental tDMRs in comparison to UC-WBC, we applied a tissue-specific approach in our EWAS in PE as well.

The association between EOPE and LOPE and tissue-specific DNA methylation in newborns. EOPE demonstrated extensive genome-wide DNA methylation differences in UC-WBC and placental tissue in comparison to PTB pregnancies, whereas in LOPE no significant differential methylation was observed (**chapter 7**). In the candidate-gene study we observed an association between PE and hypomethylation of the *PtGF* gene and lower levels of the SAM:SAH ratio in placental tissue, more pronounced in EOPE than in LOPE (**chapter 8**).

The PE-related excessive oxidative stress exposure during pregnancy is suggested to be highly involved in the disturbance of epigenetic programming¹⁵. In response to various forms of stress, cells increase the production of important protective proteins while reducing the translation of others that are temporarily less essential to conserve energy, aiming at restoring cellular homeostasis¹². We observed both hyper- and hypomethylation in association with EOPE in UC-WBC and placenta, and enrichment of both positive and negative regulation of transcription among the functional annotations of DMP genes, in line with these cellular stress responses. Moreover, in case of partial failure to restore cellular homeostasis or a sudden excessive stress event, cellular death might occur, through apoptosis or necrosis¹³. Also this cellular death- and survival pathway was identified among the DMP gene functional annotations, underlining the potential involvement of excessive oxidative stress.

In our genome-wide and *P/IGF* gene methylation studies, altered DNA methylation seems to be more pronounced in EOPE pregnancies, where placental and newborn tissues are indeed exposed to excessive oxidative stress very early in pregnancy, in contrast to the oxidative stress exposure later in pregnancy in LOPE^{11, 12}. If early unplugging of spiral arteries occurs already at eight-to-nine weeks of gestation like in EOPE, chorionic villi are not mature enough to withstand the oxidative stress through contact with maternal oxygenated blood, disturbing the formation of the definitive placenta by restricted invasion and impaired remodelling of spiral arteries¹². One might hypothesize that the epigenetic programming involved in this initial placental formation and differentiation is in fact already affected, perhaps inducing the further development of EOPE, rather than being a consequence of the disease (**Figure 2A, new hypothesis 2**). Perhaps, even the essential process of epigenetic reprogramming at the late-morula stage (at 3-4 days after fertilisation) is already disturbed, also suggesting a more causative epigenetic involvement (**Figure 2A, new hypothesis 2**). Whether cause or consequence, the evident involvement of impaired placentation in EOPE may explain the large extent of differential DNA methylation in the placenta¹¹. Also the maternal and fetal pro-inflammatory milieu is more pronounced in EOPE than in LOPE, with more potential consequences for UC-WBC epigenetic programming, as substantiated by our data¹⁵. The lack of genome-wide differential methylation in LOPE is in accordance to previous literature^{152, 153, 160-162}. A possible reason for only observing associations between EOPE and PTB is that these groups are least affected by a large gestational age range and additional comorbidities and hence easier to compare than the other control groups.

The involvement of DNA methylation differences in cardiovascular programming of PE offspring was strongly suggested by many identified gene-ontology (GO) functional annotations and pathways associated with the DMP genes. Repeated enrichment of genetic networks associated with the development of cardiovascular and metabolic disease was observed. This is partly substantiated by previous PE EWAS, describing differential methylation in the fatty acid synthase pathway and in collagen-related genes^{152, 154}. Yuen et al identified hypomethylation of the *TIMP3* gene in EOPE placentas, suggesting reduced angiogenesis and trophoblast invasiveness by use of the Illumina GoldenGate Methylation assay¹⁶². Moreover, further evidence for cardiovascular programming involvement is available in our *P/IGF* candidate-gene study. Here, hypomethylation of the *P/IGF* gene in placental tissue demonstrated that (anti)

angiogenic factors are likely to be involved in the pathophysiology of EOPE in particular. The additional lower placental SAM:SAH ratio represents a lower cellular methylation potential, which is in line with both the placental hypomethylation of *P/IGF* and the observed genome-wide predominant hypomethylated state of the placenta in EOPE. *P/IGF* is considered as one of the major proangiogenic factors, essential for controlling placental growth and maintaining normal endothelial structure and function. PE is associated with lower levels of *P/IGF* due to increased *sFlt-1* levels in plasma and declined placental *P/IGF* production¹². Our results are in agreement with the candidate gene study by Sundrani et al., describing altered placental DNA methylation of (anti)angiogenic factors *VEGF* and *FLT-1* in association with PE¹⁶³.

Enrichment of other relevant pathways involved in systemic inflammation, cell differentiation and development and erythropoiesis may specifically explain the decreased leucocytes and increased NRBC that we observed in UCB of EOPE pregnancies and decreased umbilical vein wall thickness in PE. The respiratory development pathway enrichment may explain the suggested association of PE with neonatal bronchopulmonary dysplasia development²⁰⁷. Also the renin-angiotensin system (RAS) pathway was enriched and seems important in PE pathophysiology, underlining the generally suggested potential role of DNA methylation in the process of cardiovascular programming in PE offspring.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data used for this thesis were collected in The Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort, a prospective tertiary hospital-based cohort study. Both the clinical and epigenetic studies are based on the same samples derived from the same nested case-control study. This enables us to correlate the epigenetic findings to the clinical findings. Inherent to the tertiary hospital setting is the limited external validity due to the proportion of high-risk pregnancies. Case- and control pregnancies presented with a relatively high percentage of concurrent comorbidity. In particular pregnancies included in the first trimester of pregnancy that were afterwards enrolled as uncomplicated pregnancies (without PE, gestational hypertension, FGR and PTB) showed a high frequency of relevant maternal chronic comorbidity, including endocrine-, metabolic-, auto-immune-, renal- or cardiovascular disease. Complicated EOPE, LOPE, FGR and PTB pregnancies were more often included in the second half of pregnancy and presented with a lower frequency of additional maternal comorbidity.

Although we initially intended to enrol FGR- and PTB complicated

control groups to avoid additional adjustment for gestational age and birth weight, unfortunately EOPE and LOPE still appeared to have a lower birth weight and shorter gestational age than FGR and PTB. This turned out to be a significant limitation for our analysis, because we had to apply adjustments despite the small sample sizes in each subgroup. Due to the unmatched inclusion we were not able to conduct a matched analysis afterwards, nor was it possible to adjust for all potential confounders and therefore also inherent to the observational study design residual confounding cannot be excluded. Selection bias due to the relatively high percentage of missing samples in (the most severe) EOPE and LOPE pregnancies may have occurred, which seemed a result of random factors such as stressful deliveries, caesarean sections or night shifts, but did not seem systematic.

A limitation of the epigenetic studies is the absence of expression data to validate our findings and the absence of validation by alternative DNA methylation techniques. Secondly, the implications of our findings would have been improved by using homogeneous cell types of placental tissue and UC-WBC, thereby avoiding any potential confounding of methylation differences due to underlying cell mixture differences ^{134, 135}.

In general, the studies discussed in this thesis cannot distinguish whether observed umbilical cord (blood) and placental characteristics are causes or consequences of EOPE or LOPE. We did establish important associations in line with our hypothesis, but we therefore cannot draw conclusions on causal relationships between our findings and PE and the increased cardiovascular disease risk, as depicted in **Figure 2**. However, this generates new hypotheses and provides an important background for future studies.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis implies that newborns of pregnancies complicated by especially EOPE, may possess a cardiovascular phenotype characterised by disturbed haematopoiesis, impaired endothelial function and early structural vascular alterations. Given the increased risk to develop hypertension and stroke in adulthood, these children might therefore benefit from clinical follow-up, aiming at life-style interventions to lower and possibly prevent the risk of adult cardiovascular events. Not only postnatal risk-management is needed, but also prenatal or even periconceptional intervention programmes are warranted to optimise the environment for the developing placenta and cardiovascular system of the embryo and fetus. This may be particularly beneficial for the maternal

metabolic- and cardiovascular risk profile in LOPE pregnancies, helping both mother and child throughout pregnancy and beyond.

The observed epigenetic involvement in EOPE pregnancies may be useful in this context. By measuring validated epigenetic marks in early pregnancy in cell-free fetal DNA obtained from maternal peripheral blood, or at delivery from placental tissue or umbilical cord (blood), a clinical predictive value may be available ¹⁸. Epigenetic marks could also serve as possible targets for intervention and prevention, given that epigenetic changes are potentially dynamic ^{208, 209}. An example of an epigenetic-driven preventive measure may be to optimise periconceptional maternal folic acid intake, thereby providing an important source of methylgroups necessary for various cellular developmental processes, such as DNA methylation. The identified lower SAM:SAH ratio in PE pregnancies indeed suggests a lower cellular methylation potential, and folic acid supplementation has proven to decrease maternal homocysteine levels and thereby the risk of PE ²¹⁰.

New research questions to be addressed in future clinical and epigenetic association studies are provided by this thesis. The evident difference in EOPE and LOPE presented throughout this thesis, implies that the two phenotypes should be considered as different disease entities in future studies, also with respect to the associated cardiovascular disease risk in offspring. Control groups should preferably be matched for gestational age and birthweight to avoid extensive adjustment in small sample size association studies examining PE.

The use of umbilical cord (vascular) tissue and DNA methylation measurements seems promising for studying associations between adverse antenatal environmental factors such as PE, FGR, PTB and disease-outcome within the DOHaD concept. The relationship between umbilical cord vasculature and newborn vasculature could be examined by (functional) studies addressing haemodynamic, hormonal and morphological (dis)agreements to establish the predictive value of this tissue. Potential associations with early predictive umbilical cord ultrasound measures may also be useful to investigate in this context and the relation with upcoming (anti)angiogenic biomarkers *sFlt-1* and *PlGF*. Additionally, due to its non-invasive character, microcirculatory measurements may provide real-time information on cardiovascular features of newborn vascular sites that would otherwise be inaccessible.

With respect to future EWAS, firstly, the observed heterogeneity of UCB cell populations in EOPE, LOPE, FGR and PTB implies that UC-WBC

mixtures should always be considered as potential confounder. The marginal genome-wide UC-MNC and UC-WBC methylation differences seem negligible, supporting the use of easily accessible UC-WBC over UC-MNC. However, the observed (genome-wide) tissue-specific aspect of DNA methylation calls into question whether certain representative tissues such as UC-WBC, can be generally used in epigenetic epidemiological studies examining placental and/or vascular-related diseases of pregnancy. HUVEC is suggested to serve as an accessible vascular tissue for human studies investigating associations between prenatal exposures and vascular-related pregnancy outcome and future diseases, with epigenetic programming as underlying mechanism. In order to optimise the benefits of EWAS, we should apply a universal approach concerning study design and statistics, enhance the use of functional and technical validation, and stimulate the collaboration between research groups to achieve larger sample sizes. Moreover, further research with repeated measurements is needed to cover the maintenance and stability of (tissue-specific) methylation differences throughout pregnancy and postnatal life. Finally, gene-body regions appeared most susceptible to (tissue-specific) variation in DNA methylation, highlighting their potential significance in future EWAS.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The associations demonstrated in this thesis support our hypothesis that the development and epigenetic programming of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues is disturbed in EOPE offspring, and as such suggest that this (partly) explains their increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease in later life. This seems to be less applicable for LOPE.

We emphasize that those newborns at increased cardiovascular risk should be identified in order to establish targeted therapeutic risk management to lower and possibly prevent cardiovascular events in adulthood. This should be incorporated in a larger sample set prospective cohort study with long-term cardiovascular follow-up in mothers and offspring. Prenatal and periconceptional interventions are needed to improve intrauterine conditions for placental, embryonic and fetal development, especially in mothers at risk to develop LOPE. Although (genome-wide) epigenetic studies are challenging and need to be optimised, they may provide novel genomic loci or pathways of interest that could contribute to a better understanding of cardiovascular disease development in PE, and perhaps methylation-based early prediction of cardiovascular risk in offspring.



CHAPTER 10

Summary / Samenvatting

SUMMARY

Evidence is accumulating that mothers and offspring exposed to pregnancies complicated by preeclampsia (PE) have an enhanced risk to develop cardiovascular disease in later life. PE complicates 2-8% of all pregnancies and is defined as gestational hypertension accompanied by significant proteinuria arising *de novo* at or after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Pregnancies complicated by PE are characterised by high maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality. According to the moment of disease-onset, two main disease entities have been identified, with early-onset PE (EOPE) as the more severe phenotype, diagnosed before 34 weeks of gestation and late-onset PE (LOPE) diagnosed at or after 34 weeks of gestation.

Currently, the exact pathophysiology of both phenotypes is not yet fully understood, but there is extensive evidence that EOPE originates from poor first trimester placentation, causing episodes of placental hypoxia and reperfusion, often resulting in fetal growth restricted fetuses. LOPE however, is considered a more maternal disorder originating from underlying maternal cardiovascular- and metabolic risk factors and associated with typically well-grown fetuses. In both phenotypes, the developing embryo and fetus are exposed to excessive oxidative stress, although in LOPE this occurs more towards the end of gestation. As a result, pro-inflammatory cytokines and (anti)angiogenic factors are released into the maternal circulation inducing maternal endothelial dysfunction, leading to the clinical symptoms of PE.

The adverse prenatal PE environment may disturb the development and programming of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues, resulting in a cardiovascular phenotype of the newborn that is more susceptible to develop future cardiovascular diseases. The process of developmental programming is strongly mediated by various epigenetic mechanisms such as DNA methylation, which involves the attachment of a methyl group on the DNA sequence, thereby regulating gene-expression. The aim of the present thesis was to gain more insight into the following topics:

1. The development of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (a), and of the maternal microcirculation in association with PE (b) (**Part I**)
2. The tissue-specific DNA methylation in placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues in association with EOPE and LOPE (**Part II**) (**Figure 1**, page 12-13)

The majority of data described in this thesis was obtained from a nested case-control study embedded in The Rotterdam Periconceptional Cohort, a prospective hospital-

based cohort study conducted at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

The association between EOPE and LOPE and the development of placental and newborn tissues was examined by flow-cytometry measurements of UCB cell populations, revealing a four to sevenfold decreased neutrophil count and a fivefold increased nucleated red blood cell count in association with EOPE (**chapter 2**). Moreover, we investigated the relation between EOPE and LOPE and (histo-) morphologic measurements of the placenta and umbilical cord (vasculature). This data demonstrated that PE exposure was associated with a smaller umbilical vein area and vein wall thickness and LOPE with a larger placental width. These findings suggest that the prenatal development of haematopoiesis and vasculogenesis is disturbed in especially EOPE (**chapter 3**) (**Figure 2, association A1 and B1**, page 156-157).

To investigate if the known maternal endothelial dysfunction during PE exposure may be associated with real-time maternal cardiovascular disturbances, maternal sublingual microcirculatory measurements were performed. We demonstrated that women with severe PE and HELLP syndrome showed a reduced perfused vessel density, a reduced flow velocity and increased heterogeneity of flow in capillaries, compared with women with severe PE without HELLP syndrome. This suggests an involvement of microcirculatory dysfunction in the development of PE/HELLP syndrome, potentially related to endothelial dysfunction and the increased maternal cardiovascular disease risk after PE pregnancies (**chapter 4**).

In order to examine whether epigenetic mechanisms may be underlying these findings and whether they are associated with PE, (genome-wide) tissue-specific DNA methylation studies were performed. We initially demonstrated the tissue-specific aspect of DNA methylation of imprinted *IGF2/H19* genes in Wharton jelly of the umbilical cord and placental tissue, versus UC-MNC (**chapter 5**). Next on a genome-wide level, HUVEC and placental tissue displayed large tissue-specific differences in 43% and 73% of all measured CpGs respectively, versus UC-WBC. No differentially methylated regions were identified between UC-MNC and UC-WBC (**chapter 6**).

The relation between EOPE, LOPE and DNA methylation alterations was therefore investigated in a tissue-specific manner and demonstrated extensive genome-wide UCB- and placental DNA methylation differences in EOPE, in comparison to PTB pregnancies. Moreover, functional annotations of DMP genes revealed a strong enrichment of pathways associated with cellular stress responses, cardiovascular- and metabolic system development, systemic

inflammation, cellular differentiation and erythropoiesis, the latter substantiating our findings in chapter 2 and 3. No significant differential methylation was observed in LOPE pregnancies (**chapter 7**) (**Figure 2, association A2**, page 156). Finally, we revealed that PE was associated with hypomethylation of the *PLGF* gene and a lower placental SAM:SAH ratio, more pronounced in EOPE than LOPE (**chapter 8**).

In conclusion, this thesis provides evidence for associations between prenatal exposure to particularly EOPE and a disturbed development and epigenetic programming of placental and newborn cardiovascular tissues, as potentially underlying mechanism for the association with future cardiovascular risk in offspring. We therefore emphasize the need for periconceptional and prenatal intervention programmes to optimise the environment for the developing placenta and the cardiovascular system of the embryo and fetus. These programmes should in particular target future mothers with metabolic- and cardiovascular risk factors and an increased risk of especially LOPE.

SAMENVATTING

In toenemende mate is aangetoond dat vrouwen en kinderen die blootgesteld werden aan een zwangerschap gecompliceerd door preeclampsie (PE) een verhoogd risico hebben op het ontwikkelen van cardiovasculaire ziekten op latere leeftijd. PE manifesteert zich in 2-8% van alle zwangerschappen en wordt gedefinieerd als een hoge bloeddruk in combinatie met eiwitverlies in de urine, optredend vanaf de 20e zwangerschapsweek. Zwangerschappen die gecompliceerd worden door PE hebben een hoge maternale en perinatale morbiditeit en mortaliteit. Naar gelang het moment waarop de ziekte ontstaat wordt onderscheid gemaakt tussen twee vormen van PE: vroege en late PE. De vroeg in de zwangerschap optredende vorm van PE laat vaak een ernstiger verloop zien en wordt gediagnosticeerd voor de 34^e zwangerschapsweek; de later optredende vorm van PE wordt vanaf 34 weken zwangerschapsduur gediagnosticeerd.

De exacte ontstaanswijze van PE is nog niet volledig bekend, maar er zijn sterke aanwijzingen dat vroege PE ontstaat door een verstoorde aanleg van de placenta in het eerste trimester van de zwangerschap, waardoor er een suboptimale zuurstoftoevoer in de placenta optreedt, en het ontwikkelende kind vaak groeivertraging vertoont. Late PE wordt meer gezien als een maternale ziekte, omdat de moeder zelf vaak diverse predisponerende cardiovasculaire risicofactoren heeft en het kind tijdens de zwangerschap een normale groei vertoont. Bij beide vormen van PE wordt het ontwikkelende kind aan overmatige hoeveelheden oxidatieve stress blootgesteld, echter bij late PE in een veel later stadium van de zwangerschap dan bij vroege PE. Dit veroorzaakt een verhoogde ontstekingsreactie in de maternale circulatie, resulterend in het dysfunctioneren van het endotheel (de binnenbekleding van bloedvaten) en de klinische symptomen van PE.

Een zwangerschap die gecompliceerd wordt door PE staat dus onder invloed van diverse suboptimale intra-uteriene omgevingsfactoren, die zouden kunnen leiden tot een verstoorde ontwikkeling van de placenta en de cardiovasculaire weefsels van de pasgeborene, resulterend in een verhoogd risico op het ontwikkelen van cardiovasculaire ziekten op latere leeftijd. De ontwikkeling van deze weefsels wordt sterk gereguleerd door verschillende epigenetische mechanismen waaronder DNA methylering, een proces dat gen-expressie kan reguleren (zie voor een uitgebreide Nederlandse uitleg hiervan pagina 176-177). Het doel van dit proefschrift is om meer inzicht te krijgen in:

1. De ontwikkeling van de placenta en cardiovasculaire weefsels van de pasgeborene in associatie met vroege en late PE (a), en de maternale microcirculatie in associatie met PE (b) (**Deel 1**)

2. De weefsel-specifieke DNA methylering in de placenta en cardiovasculaire weefsels van de pasgeborene in associatie met vroege en late PE (**Deel II**) (**Figuur 1**, pagina 12-13)

Het grootste deel van de data die gebruikt werden voor dit proefschrift is afkomstig van een case-control studie die werd uitgevoerd binnen het Rotterdam Periconceptie Cohort, een prospectieve cohort-studie gebaseerd op de ziekenhuispopulatie van de afdeling Verloskunde en Gynaecologie van het Erasmus MC in Rotterdam.

De associatie tussen vroege en late PE en de ontwikkeling van de placenta en de cardiovasculaire weefsels van de pasgeborene werd onderzocht middels flow-cytometrie op verschillende bloedcellen uit navelstrengbloed, waarbij een 4 tot 7-maal lagere neutrofielen hoeveelheid en een 5-maal hogere kernhoudende erythrocyten hoeveelheid werd aangetoond in associatie met EOPE (**hoofdstuk 2**). Vervolgens onderzochten we de relatie tussen vroege en late PE en (histo-)morphologische metingen van de placenta en navelstreng (vasculatuur). Er werd een associatie aangetoond tussen PE en een kleinere navelstrengvene-oppervlakte- en wanddikte en tussen late PE en een grotere placenta-breedte. Deze bevindingen suggereren dat de prenatale ontwikkeling van haematopoiese en vasculogenese (aanmaak van bloedcellen en bloedvaten) verstoord is bij vooral EOPE (**hoofdstuk 3**) (**Figuur 2, association A1 and B1**, pagina 156-157).

Om te onderzoeken of de maternale endotheel dysfunctie gedurende een zwangerschap die gecompliceerd wordt door PE gepaard gaat met maternale cardiovasculaire afwijkingen, hebben we maternale sublinguale microcirculatoire metingen uitgevoerd. Daarmee toonden we aan dat in het capillaire vaatbed (allerkleinste bloedvaatjes) van vrouwen met ernstige PE en HELLP syndroom een lagere dichtheid van goed doorstroomde capillairen bestaat, met een lagere stroomsnelheid van het bloed en een toegenomen heterogeniteit van de bloedstroom, i.c.m. vrouwen zonder HELLP syndroom. Dit suggereert dat het suboptimaal functioneren van het capillaire vaatbedsysteem betrokken zou kunnen zijn in de ontwikkeling van PE/HELLP en mogelijk gerelateerd is aan de maternale endotheel dysfunctie en het verhoogde cardiovasculaire risico van vrouwen na een zwangerschap gecompliceerd door PE (**hoofdstuk 4**).

Met als doel te onderzoeken of epigenetische mechanismen aan deze bevindingen ten grondslag liggen en geassocieerd zijn met PE, hebben we (genoomwijde) weefsel-specifieke studies naar DNA methylering verricht. Allereerst hebben we de weefsel-specificiteit van DNA methylering aangetoond van geimprinte genen *IGF2/H19* in DNA afkomstig van de Wharton jelly

van de navelstreng (gelei-achtige substantie om de navelstrengvaten) en de placenta, in vergelijking met leucocyten in navelstrengbloed (**hoofdstuk 5**). Vervolgens observeerden we op genoom-wijde schaal, dat endotheelcellen van de navelstrengvene en placentaweefsel een grote hoeveelheid weefsel-specifiek gemethyleerde regio's vertonen ten opzichte van DNA uit navelstrengbloed leucocyten, respectievelijk in 43% en 73% van de totale hoeveelheid gemeten posities. Er werden geen verschillend gemethyleerde regio's aangetoond tussen DNA uit navelstrengbloed leucocyten en navelstrengbloed mononucleaire cellen (**hoofdstuk 6**).

De relatie tussen vroege en late PE en veranderingen in DNA methylering werd daarom ook in verschillende weefsels onderzocht. We observeerden uitgebreide genoomwijde verschillen in DNA methylering in navelstrengbloed en placentaweefsel van zwangerschappen gecompliceerd door vroege PE, i.c.m. zwangerschappen die gecompliceerd werden door spontane vroeggeboorte. De verschillend gemethyleerde posities bleken onder meer in of bij genen te liggen die cellulaire stress reguleren, evenals de ontwikkeling van het cardiovasculaire-metabole systeem, ontstekingsreacties, celdifferentiatie en de ontwikkeling van rode bloedcellen. Dit laatste komt overeen met de bevindingen uit hoofdstukken 2 en 3. Er werden geen significante epigenetische bevindingen aangetoond in navelstrengbloed en placentaweefsel van zwangerschappen met late PE (**hoofdstuk 7**) (**Figuur 2, association A2**, pagina 156). Tot slot beschrijven we de associatie tussen PE en lagere methylering van het *P/GF*-gen en een lagere SAM:SAH ratio in placentaweefsel, beide meer uitgesproken in vroege dan late PE (**hoofdstuk 8**).

Concluderend toont dit proefschrift aan dat er een associatie bestaat tussen prenatale blootstelling aan vroege PE en een verstoring van de ontwikkeling en programmering van de placenta en cardiovasculaire weefsels van de pasgeborene. Deze verstoring zou een mogelijke verklaring kunnen vormen voor het verhoogde cardiovasculaire risicoprofiel van de pasgeborene op latere leeftijd. We benadrukken daarom het belang van lange-termijn cardiovasculaire screening in vrouwen en kinderen na blootstelling aan PE, om het risico op cardiovasculaire ziekten op volwassen leeftijd te kunnen verlagen of voorkomen. Met behulp van periconceptionele en prenatale interventieprogramma's zou gestreefd moeten worden naar een optimalisering van de intra-uteriene omgeving van de ontwikkelende placenta en het cardiovasculaire systeem van het ontwikkelende kind. Dit laatste zou zich vooral moeten richten op toekomstige moeders met predisponerende cardiovasculaire risicofactoren en een verhoogd risico op met name late PE.

DE DANS VAN DNA: een aanvulling op de Nederlandse samenvatting

Omdat ik de afgelopen jaren heb gemerkt dat het voor geïnteresseerde buitenstaanders niet altijd makkelijk te begrijpen is waar ik me als promovendus nu eigenlijk mee bezig heb gehouden, heb ik hier geprobeerd de begrippen *Epigenetica* en *DNA methylering* zo eenvoudig mogelijk uit te leggen, als aanvulling op de Nederlandse samenvatting. Ik gebruik hierbij een analogie die volgens mij bijzonder mooi past: dans.

Zoals we ons waarschijnlijk allemaal ongeveer kunnen voorstellen, zit in alle kernhoudende cellen van ons lichaam DNA. Het DNA is een lange opgevouwen slinger met daarop een uitgestrekte code waarin alle mogelijke processen en bestanddelen van ons lichaam zijn vastgelegd. De code bestaat uit een specifieke volgorde van verschillende letters die onze genen vormen. We zouden onze DNA code kunnen vergelijken met een choreografie, waarin alle dansbewegingen in plaats en tijd zijn vastgelegd. Wanneer we onze DNA code aflezen is het eindproduct een eiwit, en als we de choreografie opvolgen is het eindproduct een dans.

Het DNA is in principe niet te veranderen en in alle cellen gelijk. Toch is het niet zo dat een cel de hele DNA code met alle genen nodig heeft. Afhankelijk van het type cel, het type weefsel en allerlei omgevingsfactoren, is er in een cel behoefte aan specifieke eiwitten, dus bepaalde stukjes van de DNA code. Ook een choreografie is in principe niet te veranderen, en toch bestaat er een grote variatie aan uitvoeringen, doordat een choreograaf de artistieke vrijheid heeft om de choreografie te interpreteren naar zijn/haar wensen. Als we bijvoorbeeld op kerstavond naar een hedendaagse uitvoering van *De Notenkraker* gaan, is de choreografie van de oorspronkelijke choreografen Marius Petipa en Lev Ivanov onveranderd, maar de interpretatie van de choreograaf van nu waarschijnlijk heel anders dan tijdens de premiere in 1892.

Zoals een choreograaf kan bepalen hoe hij/zij de choreografie tot expressie wil laten komen tot een dans, kunnen de cellen in ons lichaam iets vergelijkbaars. Het is namelijk mogelijk om bepaalde stukjes van de DNA-code aan of uit te zetten en meer of minder tot expressie te laten komen (te *programmeren*), om zo alleen die eiwitten te produceren die nodig zijn. Dit proces van het programmeren van onze genen op de DNA code heet *epigenetische programmering* (*epi* is Grieks voor *op*, dus op onze genen).

De epigenetische programmering en de interpretatie van een choreografie worden beide sterk beïnvloed door omgevingsfactoren. Omgevingsfactoren

die de epigenetische programmering kunnen beïnvloeden zijn bijvoorbeeld leeftijd, voeding, zwangerschap, lichamelijke activiteit, roken of alcohol. Bij de interpretatie van een choreografie kunnen we bij omgevingsfactoren denken aan de theaterruimte, muziek, kostuums en ten slotte de kwaliteit van de dansers zelf. Als de omgevingsfactoren niet optimaal zijn - de muziek hapert of de dansers weinig getraind of gegeten hebben - dan is de dans niet optimaal.

Tijdens een zwangerschap die gecompliceerd wordt door preeclampsie, zijn de ontwikkelende placenta en het kind blootgesteld aan diverse negatieve omgevingsfactoren, vooral gekenmerkt door een verstoorde zuurstoftoevoer in de placenta. In deel II van dit proefschrift heb ik daarom onderzocht of blootstelling aan preeclampsie tijdens de zwangerschap geassocieerd is met veranderingen in de epigenetische programmering van het DNA.

Er zijn diverse mechanismen die zorgen voor de epigenetische programmering van het DNA. Daarvan heb ik er in dit proefschrift één onderzocht: DNA methylering. Hierbij gaat het om een chemische verbinding (methylgroep) op de DNA code, die ervoor zorgt dat een bepaald gen meer of minder makkelijk kan worden afgelezen en tot expressie kan komen. Ik heb onderzocht in hoeverre de aanwezigheid van deze methylgroepen tussen verschillende cellen en weefsels verschilt, en of dit verschilt in zwangerschappen blootgesteld aan vroege en late PE en controle zwangerschappen.

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REFERENCES

AUTHORS AND AFFILIATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHD PORTFOLIO

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AST	Aspartate aminotransferase
ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BMI	Body mass index
bp	Base pairs
BP	Blood pressure
SBP	Systolic blood pressure
DBP	Diastolic blood pressure
BW	Birth weight
CI	Confidence interval
CPD	Citrate Phosphate Dextrose-solution
CpG	Cytosine phosphate Guanine nucleotides
CV	Coefficient of variation
DMR	Differentially methylated region
DMP	Differentially methylated position
EOPE	Early-onset preeclampsia
EWAS	Epigenome-wide association study
EVG	Elastica Von Gieson
FGR	Fetal growth restriction
GA	Gestational age
GO	Gene-ontology
HE	Hematoxylin/eosin
HELLP	Haemolysis, Elevated Liver enzymes and Low Platelets
HI	Heterogeneity Index
HIF-1 α	Hypoxia-Inducible Factor 1 α
IEL	Internal elastic lamina
<i>IGF2</i>	Insulin-like growth factor 2
Immature gran.	Immature granulocytes
LDH	Lactate Dehydrogenase
LED	Light-Emitting Diodes
LINE-1	Long-Interspersed Nuclear Element-1
LOPE	Late-onset preeclampsia
LUMA	Luminometric Methylation Assay
MFI	Microcirculatory Flow Index
MNC	Mononuclear cells
NRBC	Nucleated red blood cells
OPS	Orthogonal Polarisation Spectral imaging

OR	Odds ratio
PE	Preeclampsia
PIGF	Placental Growth Factor
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PTB	Preterm birth
PVD	Perfused Vessel Density
QC	Quality control
RAS	Renin-angiotensin System
ROS	Reactive oxygen species
SAH	S-adenosylhomocysteine
SAM	S-adenosylmethionine
SD	Standard deviation
SDF	Sidestream Darkfield
sFLT-1	Soluble Fms-Like Tyrosine kinase-1 receptor-1
sEng	Soluble Endoglin
UCB	Umbilical cord blood
UCBC	Umbilical cord blood cell
UC-MNC	Umbilical cord mononuclear cells
UC-WBC	Umbilical cord white blood cells
UCI	Umbilical coiling index
VEGF	Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This thesis

Chapter 2

E.M. Herzog, A.J. Eggink, M. van der Zee, J. Lagendijk, S.P. Willemsen, R. de Jonge, E.A.P. Steegers, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *The impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on umbilical cord blood cell populations*. Journal of Reproductive Immunology, 2016 Aug. 116: p. 81-85

Chapter 3

E.M. Herzog, A.J. Eggink, A. Reijnierse, M.A.M. Kerkhof, R.R. de Krijger, A.J.M. Roks, I.K.M. Reiss, A.L. Nigg, P.H.C. Eilers, E.A.P. Steegers, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *Impact of early- and late-onset preeclampsia on features of placental and newborn vascular health*. Placenta, 2017 Jan. 49: p. 72-79

Chapter 4

J.M.J. Cornette, E.M. Herzog, E.A.B. Buijs, J.J. Duvekot, D. Rizopoulos, W.C.J. Hop, D. Tibboel, E.A.P. Steegers: *Microcirculation in women with severe preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome: a case-control study*. British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 2014. 121: p. 363–370

Chapter 5

E.M. Herzog, J.M. Galvez, A.J.M. Roks, L. Stolk, M.M.P.J. Verbiest, P.H.C. Eilers, J.J. Cornelissen, E.A.P. Steegers, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *Tissue-specific DNA methylation profiles in newborns*. Clinical Epigenetics, 2013. 5: p. 8-12

Chapter 6

E.M. Herzog, A.J. Eggink, S.P. Willemsen, R.C. Sliker, J.F. Felix, A.P. Stubbs, P.J. van der Spek, J.B.J. van Meurs, B.T. Heijmans, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *The tissue-specific aspect of genome-wide DNA-methylation in newborn and placental tissues: implications for epigenetic epidemiologic studies*. (submitted)

Chapter 7

E.M. Herzog, A.J. Eggink, S.P. Willemsen, R.C. Sliker, K.P.J. Wijnands, J.F. Felix, J. Chen, A.P. Stubbs, P.J. van der Spek, J.B.J. van Meurs, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *Early- and late-onset preeclampsia and the tissue-specific epigenome of the placenta and newborn*. Placenta, 2017 Oct. 58: p. 122-132

Chapter 8

S.G. Heil, E.M. Herzog, P.H. Griffioen, B.D. van Zelst, S.P. Willemsen, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen and E.A.P. Steegers: *Hypomethylation of placental growth factor and decreased SAM:SAH ratio in placental tissue of preeclampsia-complicated pregnancies*. (submitted)

Other publications

C.B. van den Berg, I. Chaves, E.M. Herzog, E.A.P. Steegers, S.P. Willemsen, G.T.J. van der Horst, R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen: *Early- and late-onset preeclampsia and the DNA methylation of circadian clock and clock controlled genes in placental and newborn tissues*. Chronobiology International, 2017 Jun. 14: p. 1-12

J.M.J. Cornette, E.A.B. Buijs, J.J. Duvekot, E.M. Herzog, J.W. Roos-Hesselink, D. Rizopoulos, M. Meima, E.A.P. Steegers: *Hemodynamic effects of intravenous nicardipine in severely preeclamptic women with a hypertensive crisis*. Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology, 2016 Jan. 47: p. 89-95.

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Emilie Marjolein Herzog was born in 1983 in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, where she attended high school at *Het Nieuwe Eemland College*. During her graduation year she started professional preparatory dance training at CODARTS, University of the Arts, Rotterdam. After her gymnasium graduation in 2001, she performed two years of professional dance education at *De Theaterschool*, Amsterdam School of the Arts. In 2004 she started medical school at Erasmus University Rotterdam and simultaneously founded her Ballet- and Dance school in Woudenberg where she taught ballet classes to children during the weekends.

During her medical internships she became interested in the field of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and performed her last-year elective internships at the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department at the *Charité – Universitätsmedizin* in Berlin and her elective research thesis on microcirculation in preeclamptic patients at the Erasmus MC, University Medical Centre Rotterdam, under the supervision of dr. J.M.J. Cornette.

She graduated from medical school in 2010 and started her PhD project described in this thesis in 2011 under the supervision of prof. dr. R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen. As board member of the *Arts-Assistenten Vereniging*, she organised the 2013 Erasmus MC Research Day for medical residents and PhD-students.

In 2014 she started working as a junior resident at the department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the *Maasstad* Hospital Rotterdam. After obtaining a research-grant from *Stichting Gezond Geboren*, she completed the last phase of her PhD project. In 2016, she started her specialty training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the *St. Joseph Krankenhaus* in Berlin, Germany.

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Promotor: Prof. dr. R.P.M. Steegers-Theunissen
Co-promotor: Dr. A.J. Eggink

General courses	Year
Principles of Research in Medicine (ESP01)	2011
Principles of Genetic Epidemiology (ESP43)	2011
Genomics in Molecular Medicine (ESP57)	2011
Biostatistical Methods I: Basic Principles (CCO2)	2011
English Biomedical Writing and Communication	2012
Literature search	2013

Seminars and workshops

Epigenetics and Developmental Programming Conference, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK	2011
Weekly research meetings, department of Obstetrics and Prenatal Medicine, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2011-2014
2-Weekly research meetings, department of Epidemiology, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2015
Wladimiroff Research Day, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2011-2014
Coordinator of Erasmus MC Research Day for residents and PhD students	2013

Presentations

Society of Gynecological Investigations 59 th Scientific Meeting, San Diego, USA	2012
2 nd European Congress on Preconception Care and Health, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2012
International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy, European Congress, Trømsø, Norway	2013
8 th World Congress on Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, Singapore	2013
Society of Gynecological Investigations 61 st Scientific Meeting, Florence, Italy	2014
Research meeting department of Obstetrics and Prenatal Medicine, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2011-2014
Research meeting department of Epidemiology, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2015
9 th World Congress on Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, Cape Town, South Africa	2015
International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy, European Congress, Berlin, Germany	2017

Teaching

Supervising master thesis M. Galvez, medical doctor	2011
Supervising master thesis J. Lagendijk, 6 th year medical student	2011
Supervising master thesis A. Reijnierse, 4 th year medical student	2012

Supervising master thesis N. Hou, 6 th year medical student	2012-2013
Supervising master thesis M. Kerkhof, 4 th year medical student	2013
Clinical lessons nurses, doctors, PhD students, medical students, Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, the Netherlands	2011-2013

Awards

Best Poster award (Basic/Translational research) at International Society for the Study of Hypertension in Pregnancy, European Congress, Trømsø, Norway	2013
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Grant

Grant from Foundation 'Gezond Geboren' for PhD project: <i>'Epigenome-wide analysis of DNA methylation in placental and neonatal tissues in preeclamptic pregnancies'</i>	2015
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Other

Preconception counselling of subfertile couples	2011-2013
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During last summer, my first summer in Berlin, there was a trumpeter practicing one of my favourite songs, 'Summertime' by Gershwin, almost daily from an open window close to my apartment. I enjoyed it from my tiny balcony and realised that this song represents the feeling of my PhD period in the best way possible: it drags forward, feels intense, uncomfortable, and a little melancholic, until the tone changes after the third sentence... Then it feels alright, reassuring, and extremely beautiful. Then you are glad you did it, feel a tiny bit proud, and you realise how much you have learned. You also realise, how many people were of extreme importance during that period, both professionally and privately. Of these people, I would like to thank the following in particular (in their own language):

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PRE ECT AMP AIS